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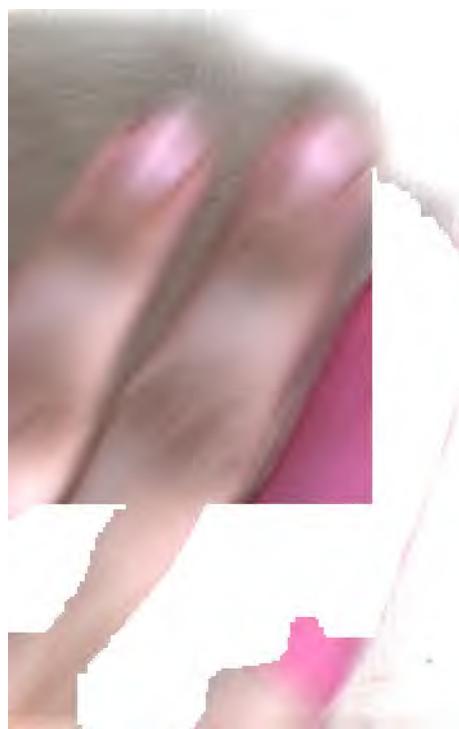
THE ANNALS



M·E·Francis

I. Fiction, Irish





NCW

John C. Smith





BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN A NORTH COUNTRY VILLAGE
THE STORY OF DAN
A DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL
MAIME O' THE CORNER
FRIEZE AND FUSTIAN
AMONG THE UNTRODDEN WAYS
MISS ERIN
THE DUENNA OF A GENIUS
YEOMAN FLEETWOOD
FIANDER'S WIDOW
THE MANOR FARM
CHRISTIAN THAL
LYCHGATE HALL
DORSET DEAR
WILD WHEAT

SIMPLE ANNALS

1. Fiction, Irish



SIMPLE ANNALS

BY

M. E. FRANCIS

(Mrs. FRANCIS BLUNDELL)

Author of "Pastorals of Dorset," "Fiander's Widow,"
"Yeoman Fleetwood,"
etc., etc.



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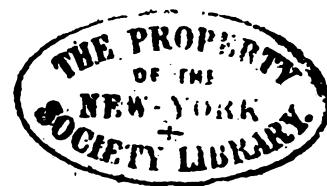
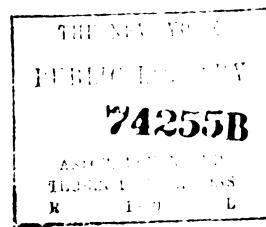
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To MRS. RITCHIE

(ANNE THACKERAY).

IN dedicating to you these *Simple Annals* I love to recall that the hand which drew for us Colonel Newcome gave us also the portraits of Martha Honeyman and Hannah Hicks, and that you yourself are the Author of *Miss Angel* and *Toilers and Spinsters*. I beg you therefore to look kindly on this little book "for the sake"—to quote your own phrase—"of things that cannot pass away"—such beautiful and delicate work as yours, and a great Memory.

M: B.





F O R E W O R D.

THESE studies of the lives of working women pretend neither to analyse conditions nor to grapple with problems ; they claim merely to depict some of the joys and sorrows of a large and varied class.

The lot of these sisters of the yoke is not by any means all sordid ; a golden thread runs through the homespun of even the most commonplace life. The difficulties which environ the breadwinner are sometimes unexpectedly solved. But the solution is not new—it is, indeed, the very same that obtained in the days when Ruth gleaned the ears of corn in the field of Boaz.

Love is an excellent thing, a great good indeed, which alone maketh light all that is burthensome and equally bears all that is unequal. For it carrieth a burthen without being burthened and maketh all that which is bitter sweet and savoury.

So wrote the old Flemish monk five centuries ago in his narrow cell ; but the dictum is no less true to-day.

While the young folks go a-courting in the twilight, and the old ones sit side by side near the cottage hearth, and the mother's tired face lights up at the sound of little pattering feet, and lonely women clasp hands across the void—is not the yoke lifted and the burthen lightened ?

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MADAME FÉLICIE.

THERE was great excitement among the villagers when Monsieur and Madame Ribaud took up their residence in the little house just opposite the main entrance to the "Mansion". It was a modest little house enough, with white-washed walls and tiled roof, and about ten square yards of garden in front divided from the road by a neat paling and an iron gate.

On the morning after the arrival of the newly wedded pair, Monsieur Ribaud, whose Christian name was Anatole, was observed to superintend with great satisfaction the affixing to the top bar of the gate aforesaid of a small brass plate, on which were inscribed the words "Les Rosiers". There were, in fact, two rather stunted rose-trees in the garden, besides several carnations, a patch of mignonette, and a whole row of sweet-williams.

The neighbours did not understand the new-fangled title; but when, a few days later, a card appeared in the parlour window bearing the legend—

MADAME FÉLICIE RIBAUD,
Robes et Confections,

they thought they knew all about it. Robes! Yes, they had heard that Madame Ribaud was a dressmaker;

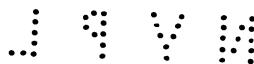


and confectionery—every one knew that Mr. Ribaud was the “Lard’s” man-cook. Yet when the first adventurous little village urchin strayed into the new premises, requesting “an ‘aporth o’ sweets,” there was no sign of any such commodity, and when he pointed to the placard in the window Madame Félicie shook her head and laughed till every little white tooth was plainly visible.

She was clearly a product of Paris, this black-eyed slender woman, from the topmost curl of her pretty wavy hair to the buckle of her little high-heeled shoe.

Even the most finished French scholars of the aristocracy could scarcely understand her *grasseymen*; all sorts of odd little modern words, not to be found even in the dictionary, escaped her when she was excited. She walked with a curious undulating gait, and carried herself as if she were a queen. She looked altogether so completely out of place in this sleepy Dorset hamlet that the village people gaped as she passed, and the more initiated wondered how long she would endure her surroundings.

But Madame Félicie was always gay. She laughed as she scrubbed her doorstep of a morning, and tried to talk in her funny broken English to the postman and the milkboy; she sang over her housework, which she accomplished with a prodigious amount of energy, involving much throwing open of windows, and thumping of pillows, and shaking of dusters; she sang also as she worked her sewing-machine; she talked to her customers the prettiest little prattle in the world, imitating as nearly as possible their own somewhat



Anglicised version of her native tongue. She considered this but polite. Thus she would say, with her head on one side, in reply to a query:—

“*Oh, si, Madame, certainement j'aime la contrée*”. Or, again, she would recommend some particular shade of silk or ribbon, declaring vehemently “*Cela sied si bien à la complexion de Madame*”.

Somebody asked her once if she did not feel dull in the little quiet place, after spending her life in gay delightful Paris, and she became pensive for a moment or two, and then answered with a laugh and a shrug—and this time in English:—

“But no, Madame, I am not dull; one has one's interior”.

The truth was that Madame Félicie was very much in love with her husband. He was fifteen years older than she—a big, stout, good-humoured looking man with a twinkling eye, and hair that, having been cut persistently *en brosse* since his earliest childhood, stood straight on end the moment he removed hat or cap. He was not beautiful to look at, this good Anatole, but then he had such a heart—it was impossible to conceive what a heart he had, Madame Félicie often declared.

Every day, when he set out for the great house, she accompanied him to the lodge gates, and parted from him there with a little kiss on either cheek; this ceremony necessitated her standing on tiptoe and his stooping quite a long way down; but it seemed highly satisfactory to both parties. And then she would trip away, turning at every three steps to wave her hand

and call out "*Au revoir, mon bon gros*"; and he would nod in return and say "*À ce soir, mon chou*," until his big, rotund form was lost to view at the curve of the avenue.

And at night, no matter how dark it was or what might be the weather, Madame Félicie, after putting aside her machine, and sweeping up the hearth, and setting out such a cosy little supper-table, would pop on her scarlet *capuchon*, and run up the road very quickly (because it was late and there was sometimes rough people about) and hide in the shadow of the gateway until she saw her Anatole's lantern come bobbing along amid the clumps of evergreens; on which she would clap her hands softly, and laugh under her breath, and dance up and down in the dark.

He was usually as punctual as clockwork; but, one night, Madame Félicie watched and waited in vain for a full half-hour; and it was on this occasion that the couple had their first—I may say their only—serious quarrel.

After waiting, with her cheek pressed against the unsympathetic gate till the church clock in the neighbouring town reminded her of the flight of time, the little woman took her way homewards, in very great dudgeon.

On entering she removed the supper-cloth, and got out her sewing-machine again, and was working hard with bent head and a red spot on each brown cheek when her husband arrived, breathless.

"My angel," he cried excitedly, "thou didst well to come in. Thou must have been tired of waiting. I

have been so occupied, but so occupied that I paid no attention to the time."

"Really?" said Madame; and went on working with feverish energy.

"Yes, indeed, my cherished one, I have had an inspiration—I have composed a new dish. It is a triumph. Thou wilt see for thyself how delicious it is."

But Madame's lips remained pursed up, and her machine went *click-click-click-click* in an uncompromising fashion. He was still too much elated, however, with the result of his recent efforts to be as much impressed with this attitude as she desired.

"I have called it—this new dish—*Fraises en surprise*," he went on.

"Ah?" responded Madame coldly.

"Yes. Thou seest, my little one, the strawberries must be of the finest, those large red ones; ripe, but not too ripe. I scoop out the interior, very delicately so as not to spoil the shape, and fill each one with a spoonful of strawberry cream iced just enough to give it solidity, but not enough to make it hard. Then I close the aperture with little rounds of angelica, cut out so as to resemble the stalk of the fruit itself. The idea came to me all at once. Say, then, is it not an idea, my all-dear one?"

The machine slackened for a moment, and Madame looked round with a frigid smile: "As to that, it is an idea like another".

"An idea like another!" he retorted indignantly. "But not at all. It is an idea quite apart—entirely and absolutely new."

Madame had resumed her work again, but her ironical tones sounded clearly above the clatter :—

“ *Fraises à la crème—Crème aux fraises—Fraises en surprise—Surprise à la—* ”

“ *Ça !* ” cried her lord, with mounting ire, “ what takes thee to-night ? ”

Madame’s little wheel again turned more slowly.

“ I cannot say that the idea strikes me as absolutely novel.”

“ *Allons, allons, allons !* ” said Anatole, struggling to recover his good humour, “ she is angry, the little woman, because I kept her waiting so long. But when she has tasted the result of my labours she will own that I was right.”

Now, if the chef had not been entirely carried away by his professional zeal he would have realised that this was not the way to make his *amende*. Félicie turned her back more squarely upon him and feigned to take no notice, while he opened a little basket and took out a little dish, and, finally bending over her, displayed to her resolutely unenthusiastic gaze six large red strawberries embedded in sugar foliage.

“ Eat, my treasure; try one only,” he cried jubilantly. “ It is then that thou wilt say it was worth while.”

“ No, thank you,” said Félicie acidly. “ I have no wish to set my teeth on edge. *En surprise*, did you say ? A very unpleasant surprise to most people, I should think.”

And she simulated a shiver.

“ Ah, *c'en est trop !* ” cried Monsieur in a voice of

thunder. He was so angry that he threw the plate and its contents upon the floor and stamped upon them, so that, between broken china and crushed strawberries and cream, the new carpet suffered considerably.

Then Madame laid aside her stoicism, and declared with a little shriek that he was a monster; and Monsieur, still hammering upon the fragments with his heel, vowed that she was *par trop maussade*, and that he could not and would not endure that all he held most sacred should be gibed at. Then Madame asked was it for this she had left her beloved Paris and her adored family? And Monsieur wanted to know where, then, was the reward of his devoted love and his many sacrifices?

“Sacrifices!” ejaculated Félicie, whisking towards him. “What sacrifices, pray?”

“I have given up my liberty,” said Anatole, more in sorrow than in anger now. “I have abandoned my happy, irresponsible *vis de garçon*. I have denied myself many things; I could have travelled with Milord; I could have gone to Scotland, a country which I have never seen, and which, I am assured on all sides, is most agreeable. But no. I agree to enter the service of Milord only on condition that I be not parted from my wife. By reason of this,” said Monsieur, sinking his voice, “Milord, who is ever of the most considerate, is obliged to engage for Scotland with some *mistrable cuisinière-job*.”

“But of what use is it for you, then, to stay, since you no longer love your poor wife at all?” murmured Félicie.

On this Anatole was constrained to seize himself frantically by the hair and to endeavour to lift himself up by it. "I do not love her!" he exclaimed tragically. "She says I do not love her!"

He looked appealingly at the sewing-machine. Madame's gaze also reverted thither.

"How can I believe that he loves me?" she said, with a sob, "when he keeps me waiting such a long, long time in the dark, and when he does not come home for supper, though he knows I am so hungry and will never begin without him, and—and—" (here came a whole volley of little sobs)—"when he *does* come he does not even *once* say he is sorry."

"My angel," cried Monsieur Anatole, "thou art telling little lies. Surely I said I was sorry."

"No, no, indeed thou didst not," said Félicie, still much injured. "Thou didst talk about thy new dish, and thou didst say that it was worth while waiting for it, and that I would see thou hadst been right."

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Anatole, looking very knowing all at once. "And of course I should have said that I was wrong, *mon pauvre petit chou-chou!*" He lifted aside the sewing-machine and stretched his arms across the table to her.

"And yet thou seest, *ma toute belle*, I did not forget thee. *Non ça*, I was thinking of thee all the time, and picturing thy delight when thou didst see my strawberries."

"Oh, *mon pauvre gros*, and I said so many *vilaines choses!*" Madame was leaning across the table now,

and sobbing on his shoulder. "Tu m'en veux à présent," she whispered. "Bien sûr, tu m'en veux?"

And though he assured her that he forgave her, Anatole had great difficulty in persuading her to forgive herself. But when she had cried a good deal more, and kissed him a great many times, she dried her eyes, and began to clear away the mess on the floor with a little inward sigh for her spoilt carpet; and Anatole took off his coat, and put on his apron, and set to work to prepare supper. As a rule it was Félicie who did the home cooking, her husband declaring that he had enough of it at the great house. But to-night he pronounced tenderly that she was *trop émotionnée* to undertake any fresh labours, and that it should be his joy to minister to her. Therefore, when she had cleaned the carpet and washed her hands, she sat down in the armchair, and Anatole waited upon her as if she had been a duchess; and though they were both very happy and very merry, Félicie was troubled every now and then in her heart of hearts with a recurring twinge of remorse.

The months passed, and Anatole achieved fresh triumphs, and Félicie secured many new customers, for not only was she considered to have a wonderful cut, but there was a certain piquant attraction about employing a real live Parisian dressmaker. The couple were as busy as bees and as thrifty. It was their intention to make a fortune as speedily as possible, in order that they might live in France for ever after.

At Christmas a new marvel set the village agog. A baby arrived upon the scene—a ridiculous French baby,

which was enveloped in swaddling clothes and was carried about on a pillow by a little black-eyed nurse, who wore a frilled cap and was about three feet high. The baby was very fat and very brown, and its eyes were very round, and the little dark down on its head already evinced a disposition to stand on end. " *Ma fille*," as Félicie proudly declared when the mite was about six weeks old ; " *c'est Anatole tout craché*." But Anatole, with a sentimental air, opined that the little one was the living image of her mother.

Spring came late that year, and Félicie was a long time in regaining her strength; even when she got back to work again, though she declared herself perfectly well, and never would own to being in the least tired, her face had a pinched look amid all its happiness. She had more customers than ever, and when the small nurse had brought the baby in from its airing she was frequently obliged to lend a hand in basting a hem, or top-sewing a seam.

" Thou art too thin, *mon chou-chou*," Anatole would say sometimes. " Thou art running about from morning till night. Thou givest thyself no rest." But Madame was in the best of health, she said. It was by contrast with the little one that she appeared thin. The little one was fat enough.

May came, wet and windy. The Ribauds' home was much overshadowed by trees, and the branches dripped upon the roof, with a sound that would have been mournful had there not been so much cheerful bustle going on within that no one had time to notice it. And sometimes, after heavy rains, the river rose,

and the flood came right under the garden gate; and then it was damp in the little house. But Félicie put on pattens and laughed, and said certainly Dorset was different from Paris; and Anatole dug a trench outside the paling, and was much commended by his spouse for cleverness and forethought.

The river, usually so beautiful in spring, with its limpid waters reflecting the blue sky and dappled clouds, and the varying greens of the trees whose branches dipped right into it, was, this year, dreary enough. The waters looked sullen, like the clouds overhead, and a brown deposit of mud was left upon its banks after the floods had subsided, and at sundown thick white mists rose from it, shrouding the bridge and the little town on the other side, and even the trees of the "Lard's" park and the cattle huddled there. These evil mists crept even within the walls of Les Rosiers, so that, do what you might, Félicie found it difficult to keep the house warm; and when she went forth at night to meet her husband the dense vapour seemed to fill her lungs, and she often coughed long after they had returned together to the hearth.

"It is not safe for thee, my cherished one," said Anatole, "to come out so late in weather such as this. Thou must stay at home until I come."

"But the time seems so long," said Félicie. "I like you to think I am waiting for you there, and loving you."

And come she would, mist or no mist, so that Anatole, between *attendrissement* and anxiety, was well-nigh distracted.

One day, however, he came back from the town, waving delightedly a small parcel.

"I have found it," he cried. "I have had an idea, my all-dear one, which will satisfy thy heart and at the same time preserve thy precious health!"

He hastily undid the packet, and revealed a small lantern.

"Seest thou, my darling, is not this an invention? The glass on one side is red, as thou observest, and on the other green. When the weather is too bad for thee to go out thou wilt stay at home, like a prudent little wife, and thou wilt fasten this outside our bedroom window with the red side turned outwards. Red, the colour of the heart—the colour of love! And I will see it from the avenue, and I will think to myself as I hasten along, 'My adored Félicie is staying at home to please me. She is quite well and she loves me.' Well, does not that idea smile to thee?"

The idea smiled so much to Félicie that she smiled, too, and turned about the little lantern admiringly.

"The green glass is very pretty also," she said. "When shall I turn that outwards? Green, the colour of jealousy! Aha! *monsieur mon mari*, if you dare to give me occasion——"

"*Jamais de la vie*," cried Anatole, with huge delight, and assuming a very knowing air which intimated that he would not for the world—but still, if he chose—h'm, h'm! "No, no, my little one," he went on more seriously, "green signifies something prettier than jealousy; it also signifies hope."

"And when shall I tell thee to hope?" said Madame, with her head on his shoulder.

"Dame, if the marmot had not already arrived!" said Anatole reflectively. "As it is we do not seem to want hope, do we? But if, for example, thou wert suffering, and I had parted from thee in anxiety, then, to salute my return, thou wouldest hang out the lantern with the green side towards me so that I might know at once that thou wert better, and might hope that thou wouldest soon be *tout-à-fait remise*."

"I see," said Madame contentedly. "Thou thinkest of everything, *mon bon gros*."

And so after that Madame Félicie duly hung out the little glimmering red light so that Anatole might see even from very, very far off that she was thinking of him and loving him. But notwithstanding this, when the time for his home-coming drew near, the naughty, disobedient little woman would often run out all the same, and hide in the embrasure of the wall, and pounce upon her lord from behind as he went hurrying down the road with his eyes upon the tiny glowing beacon.

"It was to make thee a surprise," she would say; or "I could not resist it, dost thou see?" or, again, with a little naive air of astonishment, "But I wrapped up so warm, so warm, it could not possibly hurt me. I even covered up my mouth, as thou canst observe."

And the said little mouth was immediately uncovered again that she might embrace her Anatole upon the highway.

It was no doubt one of these forbidden expeditions that wrought such havoc in the peaceful little "interior". On returning one night, though Félicie sat very close to the fire, and though her face was quite hot, her hands remained persistently cold, and she shivered incessantly. Anatole made her some lime-blossom tea, and covered her up very warm; indeed, he spent the entire night, the good fellow, in covering her up, and tucking her in all round, and imploring her to perspire. But she did not perspire, and neither did she sleep; she coughed instead, a nasty little hacking cough. At daybreak the chef ran for the doctor—just for a precaution, he told Félicie, who was indeed anxious to get up and prepare breakfast. But when the doctor came he looked grave. It was pneumonia, and a serious case, he said; but Madame Ribaud was young, and with care—— He would look in again in the evening, and meanwhile prescribed warmth, absolute quiet, and the closest attention to his directions. He would tell the district nurse to call.

"It is I who will nurse her," said Anatole fiercely.

And so, all at once, tragedy came to Les Rosiers, where hitherto an idyll of true love had reigned undisturbed. When Jeannette, swaying the baby from side to side on its frilled pillow, paused to listen outside the door of the sick room, she could hear Madame Félicie's hurried breathing, and Monsieur Anatole's stealthy tread as he moved about within. The baby, resenting, no doubt, the changes in its hitherto unchequered existence, cried fretfully from time to time; and once Félicie showed uneasiness.

Anatole darted from the room, his eyes aflame.

"Carry her away," he cried in a hoarse whisper; "carry her out of hearing at least, if you have not the sense to stop her."

"But, m'sieur, the poor little one——"

"My wife must not be disturbed, I say. My God, it is enough to drive one mad!"

The little house was very silent after this, and Félicie dozed fitfully and feverishly, and Anatole tried to smile whenever she opened her eyes.

Once, after taking her medicine, she remained looking at him with a curious expression.

"I have been thinking, *mon bon gros*—I do not sleep all the time, thou knowest—I have been thinking . . . that day when we quarrelled."

"We never quarrelled," said Anatole huskily.

"Oh, *si—tu sais . . . la grande querelle—les fraises en surprise, tu sais ?*"

Anatole nodded; he wanted to speak, but somehow he could not.

"I have been thinking," said Madame, raising one little burning hand to stroke his sleeve, "how stupid I was not to taste them. *J'étais très maussade, hein ?* Thou didst say I was *maussade*."

"No, no, never—never anything but adorable."

And Anatole caught the little hand in his, and kissed it.

"I should so like to taste them now," said Félicie; "they must be so good, the strawberries and the ice. How delicious to feel the ice upon one's tongue! But there are no strawberries, now."

“Yes, there are strawberries,” cried the chef eagerly; “there are forced strawberries in the hothouses yonder at the château. The gardener would give me some in a minute. Couldst thou eat them, *ma mignonne*? I could soon prepare them.”

Félicie’s thick eyelashes were beginning to droop, but with an effort she opened her eyes wide.

“Yes, yes, I would like it, I would indeed. I have here on the heart, dost thou see, that I refused to taste thy invention. Besides,” she added, seeing him about to protest, “I have a longing for them—I know they must be so good.”

“I shall be back in a hour,” cried Anatole joyfully. “After all,” he said to himself as he descended the stairs, “sometimes these sick fancies are instinctive. Who knows? The coolness of the fruit might lessen the fever, and cream is certainly nourishing.”

His next-door neighbour agreed to sit with Félicie till his return; she had just taken her medicine and would not be likely to want anything for some little time. He set off as fast as his legs could carry him to the Park. Never did the legs of a stout man cover the ground more quickly; in despite of which he was longer in carrying out his purpose than he had anticipated. He was obliged to prepare the dish at the mansion, not having the necessary appliances at home. It was dusk when he descended the avenue again, carefully carrying the result of his labours; and as he came in sight of home he instinctively raised his eyes, and saw a little green light twinkling from the upper window. Green, the colour of hope! Félicie had remembered his words.

Yet at sight of the dancing gleam his heart went down, down, to the lowest depths.

In a few minutes he was in her room, and the neighbour, nodding good-naturedly, rose and withdrew.

"See, I have brought thee the strawberries," said Anatole, in a strangled voice.

Félicie opened her eyes and smiled.

"Thou must feed me," she said feebly.

With renewed hope he uncovered his little dish and cut off the tip of the largest strawberry with a silver spoon. "Taste," he said eagerly.

He bent over her, poising the spoon delicately, and she advanced her poor parched lips, and closed her eyes in token of ecstasy.

"*Délicieux!*" said Madame Félicie.

But when he offered her another mouthful she motioned the spoon away with a faint smile and a little shake of the head.

And then Anatole rushed blindly from the room, and clattered downstairs, almost overturning the good woman from next door, who was fastening her shawl at the foot.

"Well, to be sure," cried she indignantly, "whatever is the man thinking about? Makin' so much noise as a regiment, and his missus that ill——"

"Animal!" cried Anatole inarticulately, "I go that she not see me cry!"

And he rushed into the little parlour, and shut the door.

A few minutes later he emerged, with red eyes, to meet the doctor; and the doctor was very kind, and said while there was life there was hope.

A little later that night, as Anatole was sitting by her bedside holding one small hand in his—the small fevered hand with its roughened forefinger—she moved her head upon the pillow, so that she could see him more plainly.

“*Mon bon gros*, I think of something.”

“Of what, then, my all dear?”

“If I die thou wilt be very lonely.”

“Ah, my little angel, do not speak of such things! If thou wert to die I would surely die too.”

“Thou wouldst wish to die, I know, *mon ami*; but thou must not die—there is the little one!”

“There is the little one,” repeated Anatole, in muffled tones.

“Yes, I have been thinking—thou wilt be very lonely, my poor Anatole, and I do not want to be selfish—I—I want thee to be happy. But if thou dost marry again—the little one will have a stepmother!”

And as she faltered the last words her unnaturally bright eyes grew suddenly dim.

And though poor Anatole knew very well that he could no longer restrain his tears it did not seem worth while to run away this time; he rolled his poor face in the pillow instead, and cried, and cried, and said, “Never, never, never,” until he could no longer say anything at all.

And then Félicie moved her head yet a little nearer until her cheek rested upon his stiff hair, and said “*Mon bon gros*” for the last time.

Two melancholy little processions passed through

the gates of *Les Rosiers* within a few weeks of each other. The first went slowly upwards to the church-yard on the other side of the Park ; the second proceeded to the railway station—*Monsieur Anatole* and the baby, and the nurse, and all the little household gods. *Les Rosiers* remained deserted without any remnant of its former self, except the tiny brass plate which no one thought it worth while to remove from the gate.

Soon the forsaken house was deprived of its very name, and became henceforth known as “*Sibley’s*,” a large and noisy family of that name having taken possession of it. Cabbages were grown in the garden-plot, and a clothes-line was slung from a corner of the railing to the window-staple where Félicie used to hang her lantern.

But the rose-trees remained, and one day, five or six years later, a stout man, holding a brown paper parcel in one hand, and with the other leading a little girl, was observed to pause and earnestly consider them. And presently, loosing the child’s hand, he stretched out a hasty arm and picked a leaf from each, and kissed them, and hid them in his bosom.

It was not until after he had gone that the village folk identified “*Mossoo*”. His hair had grown quite grey, they said, but still they knew the back of him ; and the little maid—yes, now they came to think of it, any one could tell she was poor Madame’s child. The very turn of her head in that little red hood, and the very walk.

One or two, more curious than the rest, followed the

big man from afar, and saw him presently turn in at the churchyard gate, and watched as he knelt by Madame's grave. They saw him stoop and kiss the grass, and then gather a handful of it, which he hid away, like the rose-leaves, in his bosom. And then he unfastened his parcel and laid, just at her feet, such a beautiful big wreath; and then, lifting up the child, he made her kiss the cross at the head of the grave, and carried her away, wiping his eyes as he went. The watchers kept out of sight till he departed, and then went forward to examine the wreath. It was a large one, such as they had never seen, all made of yellow everlasting flowers, and there was something written on it that they could not make out.

But these were the words:—

"A ma bien-aimée".

THE BREADWINNER.

As Kate Burgess went slowly homewards, after an afternoon's shopping in the town, her face wore a very serious expression, for the expedition had been arduous in more ways than one. She had had a long walk to begin with, and then so many things were wanted and there was such a little money to buy them with, and finally, Kate and her father being very poor, and their custom being of no importance to anybody, she was obliged to carry home all her purchases herself. The week's supply of bread, the few little packets of groceries, the new sweeping-brush head which had become absolutely indispensable, old John Burgess's medicine and the "embrycation" which he declared always did his rheumatics such a power of good, though he never seemed to grow less stiff or less full of aches and pains.

As Kate trudged along the weary two miles, bent in two by the weight of her basket, however, she was not thinking so much of the purchases she had made as of those others she would dearly like to acquire. A bit of meat for poor father's Sunday dinner—a morsel of cheese; that beautiful warm Cardigan jacket which was going such a bargain on account of its being slightly damaged—what a comfort that would have been to the old man! There was a petticoat, too, to be had cheap

because it was so ugly in colour. Kate would not have minded about the ugliness, and thought, with an irrepressible shiver, of what a difference it would make under that worn old gown of hers, which had been turned, and patched, and darned, till it scarcely held together, and which was wholly ineffectual to protect its wearer against the sharp November blast.

She sighed, as she shifted her basket from one arm to the other, and turned off the road into the lane. This by-path or "drove," as it was usually called, was used merely for farm purposes, and its condition at this season of the year was such as to afford most uncomfortable footing to the human wayfarer. Here a sheet of liquid mud rendered progress well-nigh impossible, farther on, an immense rut offered a pitfall to the unwary, yonder a steep chalky incline seemed to afford at least a solid surface, but proved to be delusive, as the feet of the unlucky pedestrian sank at every step ankle-deep in a kind of white bog.

On this November day the drove was beautiful enough to delight an artist's eye, winding upwards as it did between hedges that gleamed in the level light as though sown with jewels. Every leaf was aglitter, the burnished hips glowed again; the spindle-bushes, that here and there lifted themselves from amid the tangle, presented at this sunset hour unsurpassed glories of berry and leaf. On Kate's left as she walked was a vast undulating field in which the young wheat was already springing; the sun-rays touching the reddish soil and catching every minute blade transformed the whole into an orange sea. On the other side was a

field of roots, a portion of which had been hurdled off for sheep. The shepherd was busy among them, his white frock catching the evening light, which went slanting on to it and across the backs of his charges with most picturesque effect.

Kate looked neither to right nor to left, however, but went plodding on, kilting her meagre skirts high enough to display a good deal of darned stocking. Now skirting a pool, now picking her way gingerly across a morass, now screwing herself almost into the hedge in endeavouring to avoid a rut. She was a squat little woman who might have been any age between thirty and forty, and who was, in fact, just thirty-one; her figure was, as has been said, nothing to boast of, her face homely, but undeniably pleasant to look on, with its ruddy complexion and kind brown eyes, her voice, too, was soft and pleasant, and that was all that could be said about her except that in the midst of all her anxieties she kept up a cheerful heart. When she encountered Farmer Joyce, for instance, at a sudden turn of the road, she smiled as though she had not a care in the world.

Farmer Joyce was driving home his cows but paused to greet her, a fine imposing figure, with his grey whiskers all irradiated, and his white pinner transformed into a very garment of glory.

"Ees, I be goin' home-along," said Kate, hitching her basket a little higher on her weary arm. "Father 'ull be a-callin' out for his tea, I d' 'low."

"Ah, I did pass en a few minutes ago," returned the farmer. "I did pass him, an' I did pass somebody else.

There, I did see the strangest thing jist now—I've a-see'd summat what I don't believe nobody ever see'd before!"

He screwed up his mouth with a portentous expression, and opened his eyes to their fullest extent.

"Bless me, Farmer, an' what be that?" ejaculated Kate, half-curious and half-alarmed.

"You'll see it too, my dear," responded Mr. Joyce, "you're bound to see it. There, it be a-goin' on aside o' the lane."

"Lard, Mr. Joyce, but whatever *be* it?" queried Kate, now genuinely startled.

The farmer folded his arms across his capacious chest, and laughed.

"Nothin' to frighten ye," he said. Then he grew serious again. "But I be speakin' the truth when I say 'tis most oncommon strange. There, when I went up-along jist now to fetch the cows, I see'd a young chap a-sittin' jist by the gate in the carner where there be a bit o' grass, same as if 'twas a summer's day. He had a kind o' little bundle on his knees which he did seem to be unpackin'. Well, I said 'Good-day' to en, same as I mid say to you, an' didn't take no partic'lar notice. But when I comded back—jist now, ye know—what d'ye think the man wer' doin'?"

"What?" cried Kate, as he paused dramatically.

"Why, he'd opened his bundle an' got a razor out of it, an' if ye'll believe me, there he was a-sittin' by the side o' the road——"

He broke off again, and finished the sentence in dumb show with a comprehensive sweep of his forefinger.

"La," screamed Kate, "ye don't mean to tell I the man wer' a-cuttin' his throat?"

Mr. Joyce broke into a slow chuckle.

"Dear heart alive, what a notion to come to anybody! Cuttin' his throat! No, my dear woman—he wer' shavin'. Sittin' there a-shavin' of hisself as quiet as if he was in his own bedroom."

"Fancy that!" exclaimed Kate.

"'E-es," said Mr. Joyce, giving a slight poke to the cow nearest him which had paused to nibble at the hedge. "Well, I says 'I've see'd summat'—an' I have. Come up."

With a cheery nod he went on his way, and Kate, much impressed by the remarkable anecdote, hitched up her basket again, and pursued hers at a pace sharpened by curiosity. At the foot of the next hill, just at the spot described by the farmer, she came upon the man in question. He had finished shaving and was now combing his hair with a small pocket-comb. As Kate paused involuntarily, he looked up with a bright smile.

"Good-day to you," said Kate, smiling back.

"Good day, miss," responded he, with his comb poised in the air.

Kate remained looking down at him and still smiling.

"I d' 'low I did ought to ax ye to excuse me," said he, glancing at the comb and then back again at her face; "I wasn't looking for company, d'ye see, more particularly ladies' company, when I started tidying myself up."

He was a pleasant-looking young fellow not more than three or four-and-twenty, with a complexion tanned to a gipsy brown, though his hair was light in hue and his eyes of a bright blue. He was respectably dressed in fustian and corduroy, and did not look like a tramp, though the bundle would have had a tell-tale appearance even if his actual occupation did not seem to indicate homelessness.

"No need for that," said Kate, in answer to his half apology. "I am but sorry to see anybody obliged to do their dressin' out-o'-door, this cold weather. 'Tis different in summer-time."

"Why, so 'tis," returned the other. "It be no hardship at all in summer to live out-o'-door. I've done it for a month at a time when I do go hoein'."

"Well I've done it now and again myself," returned Kate, with that hitch of her basket which was a preliminary to further progress.

"You!" cried the man. "You don't look the kind to go sleepin' out."

"I don't like doin' of it," responded Kate quickly, "but I do have to do it sometimes when father and me goes out hoein'. 'Tis just the one chance we do get in the year o' scrapin' together a few dibs."

The young man, who had been hastily finishing his toilet while she spoke, now slipped his comb into the pocket and scrambled to his feet. Kate had been backing away from him as she uttered the last words, and he observed how much her burden taxed her strength.

"There, let I catch hold o' that basket," he cried.

"I'll carry it a bit o' the way for ye. I bain't in no hurry, I bain't, and all roads be alike to me."

Kate suffered him to take her basket willingly enough.

"Well, 'tis but a little way," she conceded. "Our house is jist at the bottom of the next hill, but thikky slope up be terr'ble steep and I be jist about tired."

"Ah, that's bad," said her companion politely.

"Father and me——," Kate was resuming when she suddenly paused, apparently smitten by a qualm of conscience. "I d' low I didn't ought to have taken ye out o' your road, though it be but a little way—I reckon ye've come this road a'ready—ye be goin' to Branston, bain't ye?"

"Ees," agreed the other, "I be goin' to Branston, an' I be come fro' Darchester."

"Lookin' for work?" inquired Kate, as he paused.

"Lookin' for work. I can turn my hand to all sarts—hedgin' and ditchin', an' hoein'—or milkin'. I d' low I'll soon find a job."

"What made ye leave home?" inquired Kate, her curiosity getting the better of etiquette.

"Well, I mid say my home left I," returned he. "My mother took an' got married again—what d'ye think o' that?—an' she gettin' on for fifty, mind ye."

"Well!" exclaimed Kate.

"Ees," resumed he, "and the chap she took up wi' was a good fifteen year younger nor herself. My sisters be gone along wi' her till they can find places, poor maids, but I jist marched straight off."

"Well," ejaculated Kate again, "however could the

'ooman ha' done sich a thing! I bain't a mother myself——"

"I knowed you wasn't," said he. "Says I to myself when I see'd ye comin' along, 'Is this a maid,' says I to myself, 'or is it a married 'ooman?' An' so soon as ye come nearer, says I, 'Tis a maid'."

"Tisn't because I look so young, then," said poor Kate.

"Young enough," was the gallant response. "Then," he added, pursuing his former train of thought, "when ye did say 'father an' I,' I knowed it for certain. Was that your father I did pass a bit higher up?"

"Ees, he be trimmin' the hedge for Farmer Joyce. Farmer Joyce do sometimes give him a job, but 'tisn't many he gets now wi'out when him and me goes hoein'."

"Ye must find it a bit hard to get along," said the young fellow compassionately.

"Oh, I don't know," answered she, "I can turn my hand to a good many things like yourself."

They were going down the hill now, and the Burgess's little cottage was in sight, its thatched roof almost seeming to melt into the hedge; for by this time the sun had dipped behind the distant line of down, and the valley was sunk in shadow. But against the still-glowing evening sky a little wavering line of smoke could be seen curling upwards from the queer old chimney, and, as they drew nearer, the bent figure of an old man appeared in the open doorway, irradiated by a comfortable flicker of firelight. It might be, and probably was, a poor little place, this home of Kate's,

but nevertheless it was a home, and the wanderer at her side envied her for possessing it.

"Be that you, Kate?" piped old John Burgess as they paused at the gate, "be that you? I've been on the look-out for ye this last half-hour. The kettle's bilin' lovely."

Kate turned to take her basket from her companion, and was struck by the unconsciously wistful expression of his face.

"Since ye've come so far," she said, "ye mid jist so well come in and have a cup o' tea wi' us."

"Who be it, Kate? Who have ye brought in along o' you?" inquired John, as the stranger gratefully followed his daughter across the threshold.

"Well, I really can't say who 'tis," returned she, with a cheery laugh; "he hasn't told me his name yet."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure, for the oversight, miss," said the newcomer very politely. "I ought to ha' mentioned it—sure I ought—Sam Bonnett's my name."

"This be Mr. Sam Bonnett," explained Kate. "He be comin' to Branston to look for work and he've been so kind as to carry my basket for me, an' seein' it took en so far out o' his road I thought it but right to ax en in to have a cup o' tea."

"To be sure, to be sure," agreed John. "Kettle's bilin' nice, my dear. Sit ye down, Mr. Bonnett. I did use to know folks o' your name round Darchester side."

"Why, that's where Mr. Bonnett be come from," said Kate, highly delighted at the coincidence.

“ ‘Ees, I used to work nigh Darchester when I wer’ a young chap,” continued John, “and the Bonnets was very well thought on. One of ‘em was called Sam Bonnett too, or I’m much mistaken. No, come to think on’t, ‘twas Sol—Sol Bonnett, a thatcher he was.”

“ Why, that was my granfer,” said Sam; “ certain sure that must have been my granfer, for his name was Solomon, an’ he did make his livin’ by thatchin’.”

It was wonderful on what a different footing this discovery seemed to place the newcomer. He became at once a personal, almost an intimate, friend, and when old John had further informed Sam that though his grandfather was called Solomon he was one of the foolishest men that had ever breathed, and Sam had dutifully responded that indeed he knew the fact already, having heard his own father say so many a time, they all became immensely cheerful, and quite at their ease.

Kate made the tea with a liberality that was almost incautious when one considered the size of the packet which she extracted from her basket, and set forth her loaf and her pound of butter with so hospitable an air that no one would have guessed how much her heart subsequently misgave her when she watched the encroachments which the hungry visitor made on both. Moreover, after a moment’s hesitation, she produced and boiled the two eggs which she had been saving up for Sunday and offered one to each man.

But Sam cast a sharp glance round:—

“ Where’s yours?” he asked.

"I don't care for any to-day, thank 'ee," she replied, blushing.

Sam said no more till she returned to her place, then getting out of his chair, rather awkwardly, for he was a big, burly fellow, he came lumbering round the table with it, and popped it down on her plate.

"You eat that," he said, with a masterful jerk of the head. "You do want it a deal more than I. I won't eat another mossel unless you do."

It was perhaps scarcely a polite proceeding, but it was kind and thoughtful; Kate, accepting the attention as it was meant, ate the egg without more ado, and Sam disposed of so many morsels that, as has already been said, the small loaf and the week's supply of butter were seriously diminished.

At the conclusion of the meal the old man and his guest smoked a pipe together while Kate cleared away, Sam winning further golden opinions from his hostess by refusing to share the meagre supply of tobacco which Kate had brought, and indeed pushing generosity so far as to insist on dividing his own particular little bit of twist with the old man. Kate, having finished her work, sat down between them, opposite the wood fire, and the three chatted for a while as only Dorset rustics can chat. When Sam rose at length, it was with the utmost reluctance.

"I d' low I'd best be movin' on," he said. "I've got to look out for a lodgin' yet."

Old John, lying luxuriously back in his elbow-chair and inhaling with rapture the dregs of that deliciously

powerful pipeful of scraped twist, gazed at him thoughtfully.

"It's latish to go traipsin' off lookin' for lodgin's," he remarked, "but I reckon you've a good bit o' money in your pocket."

But no, Sam confessed that money happened to be a thing he was particularly short of.

"Then ye mid jist so well bide here for to-night," returned John. "Jist so well. Kate could give ye a shake-down—couldn't ye, Kate?"

"Ees, we've a empty room," rejoined Kate with alacrity. "At one time we did use to think we'd keep a lodger, but there this 'ere place be too much out o' the way I d' 'low, and then father an' me havin' to go off hoein' every year, there'd be no one to do for a lodger if we had one, and 'tisn't everybody we'd like to leave alone in the house."

Nevertheless on that November evening Sam Bonnett became a recognised inmate of the little Burgess household. The agreement was unsigned indeed, and entered into with great simplicity on both sides. Sam had no money, or so little as scarcely to count, but he was going to seek for work without delay, and as soon as he should obtain it would duly pay for room and keep.

His new apartment was very small and very bare, and the food provided for him was, as has been seen, both simple and scanty. Moreover, during certain months of the year when father and daughter turned out to hoe turnips, travelling from farm to farm, carrying their food with them and sleeping wherever they could, sometimes in a barn, sometimes in the

open, the new lodger would be expected to turn out, too, and either to join the expedition, or to find lodgings elsewhere.

"I d' low I'd like most to go with you," said Sam reflectively, as this last clause was submitted to him. "I d' low I do feel part of the family now."

Such few neighbours as the Burgesses possessed shook their heads over the compact.

"Why, whatever could they be thinkin' on," they were asked, "to go and take in a man like that off the side of the road? They mid be robbed an' murdered in their beds for all they knew—Farmer Joyce see'd the chap wi' a razor in his hand. An' even if they weren't worth robbin' would anybody in their senses take in a lodger what hadn't a penny in his pocket?"

Sam Bonnett, however, soon silenced his slanderers, for he not only sought for work, but obtained it, and when Saturday evening came, clapped his money down on the table with great pride.

"What be I to do with this?" asked Kate, holding up the ten-shilling bit from which he had carefully separated the two shillings.

"Why, keep it!" he responded. "Pay yourself what's fair and keep the rest. We mid want it."

"Six shillin' 'ud be enough," said Kate meditatively "or maybe seven. You be a big chap and did ought to have good keep."

"Say seven then," he rejoined, "but ye can keep the rest. I'm best wi'out it."

He pocketed the two shillings, and, walking over to the fire, stretched out his feet to the blaze.

"Well, ye can save it up if ye like," said Kate, after a moment's reflection. "Men-folks is best wi'out too much money in their pockets," she added. "I always keep father's."

"That's right, then," rejoined Sam. "I be one o' the family now, so you can keep mine."

From the very first, indeed, he behaved as though the interests of the little household were identical with his own. It was he who chopped the wood, and filled the bucket, and even worked in the garden, after hours, while the old man rested in the chimney corner. It was he who finished John Burgess's task of hedging, in that terribly rainy week when the poor old fellow could scarcely move without groaning. Kate grew so accustomed to turn to him whenever any little odd job was to be performed, that in time she even ceased to thank him, and merely signified her desire and subsequently inquired if it had been fulfilled.

On the other hand she made Sam more comfortable than he had ever been in his life. She patched and mended for him, she bought him new shirts out of the surplus cash which she stored away for him; she carried his boots herself to the cobbler's and paid for the repairs without a word to him. She spent much thought and ingenuity in varying his diet, and kept his little room clean and tidy to the last degree. She scolded him sometimes, and ordered him about, as has been said, in the same manner as she had scolded and ordered about her father when he was in a condition to be so treated. But as winter advanced poor old John's rheumatics daily grew worse, and he became more and more

feeble ; then Kate's manner towards him was all tenderness, and her kindly sharpness was reserved for Sam.

Months passed, and the hoeing season came round. John Burgess was still alive, but it was evident that there would be no hoeing for him that year, and moreover that his daughter would be unable to leave him. Nevertheless, the lump sum of money which they usually managed to earn during these weeks was more than ever needed this year. Sickness, with its consequent need for expenditure, makes a terrible hole in a small purse ; nearly a year's rent was owing, and Farmer Joyce had not yet been paid for the seed potatoes with which they had stocked their bit of ground.

" You must just bide at home and look after he," said Sam, one day, when Kate with many tears explained her difficulty to him. " You bide at home, and I'll work for both on ye. I'll be paid by the piece, d'ye see, an' I'll do the work o' two."

" Will ye ? " said Kate, eyeing him doubtfully.

" 'Ees I will," said Sam. " There, give over cryin'—I'll be bringin' back sich a big bag o' dibs ye won't know how to spend 'em all."

" Well, I'm sure 'tis very good o' you," said Kate. " You've a-been a real friend to us."

Sam grunted, after which there was a moment's silence, broken presently by the young man, who remarked that a big hole had come in his sock again, upon which Kate retorted that he really must knock down that nail in the sole of his boot, for she had other

things to do besides darnin'. This brought things back to their usual comfortable footing. Sam flattened the nail with the top of the poker, and no more protestations were made on either side.

He duly set forth in fulfilment of his promise, and no more was heard of him for many weeks, during which John Burgess grew weaker and weaker, and Kate pinched and screwed and starved herself to provide him with little comforts.

She wished many times she had asked Sam to send them a little money to go on with, instead of saving it up, as she knew he was doing, to dazzle them on his return. She thought once or twice of writing to him, and in fact did despatch one letter, but Bonnett had moved on from the place to which she addressed it, and the missive never reached him.

At length poor old John died, and Kate, amid all her grief, had to face the cruel problem of how to bury him without disgracing herself and him by applying to the parish. In her distress she went to Farmer Joyce and asked him to advance the money.

"There was nothing in the house she could pawn or sell," she explained, "and she couldn't, couldn't—apply—"

Her voice choked her.

"Ah, poor soul," said the farmer compassionately. "Ye'd be like to feel that."

"I could do wi' a few pounds," pursued Kate, wiping her eyes, "an' it 'ud only be for a little while. I'd pay ye back so soon as Sam Bonnett come home."

"Sam Bonnett," repeated the farmer slowly, "that's



THE BREADWINNER

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your lodger. The man what I first did see a-shavin' hissel at the side o' the road. Didn't he pay up then afore he did leave?"

"Oh, indeed he did ; every penny. He's gone to earn money. He did promise to bring I back all he could save arter his keep. A big lump, he did say it would be."

"But ye haven't heard from him since?" Mr. Joyce inquired anxiously.

"No, I couldn't. He be a-shiftin' about from one place to another."

"An' d'ye think he'll come back?"

"Of course he will. He's nowhere else to live."

"Ah-h, my dear," said the farmer compassionately, "light come, light gone. He didn't ha' nowhere to live when he first come, d'ye see, till he fell in wi' you. Maybe he'll fall in wi' somebody else."

Kate turned so pale, and looked so blank, on hearing this that Mr. Joyce was struck by a new idea.

"Ye wasn't cwortin', was ye?" he asked.

"Cwortin'!" echoed Kate; "why, he be nigh ten year younger nor me!"

"Ah, an' he looks it," said the farmer dispassionately. "He's a likely young chap though ; he's bound to start cwortin' some day—wi'out he's done it already."

Mrs. Joyce emerging from the dairy door confirmed this opinion.

"Very like that's why he haven't come back," she added.

Kate looked from one to the other without speaking, and Mrs. Joyce continued :—

"I don't see how you could take his money now,

Kate, my dear, if he was to come back. He bain't no relation o' yours, an' he can't go on lodgin' wi' you now your poor old father be gone. He'd ha' to shift whatever way it was—so ye can't very well take money from he."

There was a long pause, and then Kate said in a strangled voice:—

"Well, poor father's got to be buried whatever happens. If ye'll trust me wi' the few pounds—I could make three do—I'd pay ye back honest—little by little I would. I'd work it out. I'm strong enough though I mid be small, an' I'll get the money together somehow."

"Well, well," said the farmer, "what d'ye say, missis?"

The missis was never one for lending money and said so with great frankness, but on her husband reminding her that she wouldn't like to be buried by the parish herself, and on poor Kate's promise of repayment within the year if she had to go out to service to earn it, she at last agreed.

Sam Bonnett came swinging down the hill at so round a pace that it was very nearly a run; he flung open the little gate with such violence that the crazy hinges almost gave way beneath the strain; he entered the house itself according to his custom without going through the formula of knocking.

At first he thought the kitchen was empty, but finally descried by the feeble light of a very small fire a shadowy figure cowering over the hearth.

"All alone, wold chap," he cried, clapping it on the shoulder.

But it was a woman's shoulder that shrank away from him and a woman's voice that answered with a sob :—

"Haven't ye heard, Sam? I be alone indeed. Father be dead."

As, with an inarticulate exclamation, he dropped into the nearest chair, she brokenly told her pitiful story and Sam listened, and exclaimed every now and then under his breath,

"If I had but a-knowned. . . . An' I could so easy ha sent ye a pound or two. . . . Dear, to be sure, an' I reckoned on givin' ye an' the wold man sich a j'yful surprise!"

There was a long silence after she ceased speaking, and then Sam asked Kate to light a candle.

They stared at each other dolefully when she had complied. The eyes of both were full of tears, and the aspect of each well-nigh as pitiful in the one case as in the other; for Sam's clothes were ragged and his face was lean and pale, while poor Kate's sorrowful countenance bore the impress of many anxious days and sleepless nights.

With a deep sigh Sam thrust his hand into his pocket, and, drawing forth a little bag, spread its contents upon the table: a great pile of money, as it seemed to Kate.

"I did think it 'ud surprise ye," he said mournfully. "There, I did work so hard, d'ye see, an' I did eat so little as I could an' I did sleep out-o'-door pretty near

all the time; ye can see the state my clothes be in. There, it'll take ye the best part of a week to get 'em to rights I think."

"Oh, Sam," cried Kate, bursting into tears, "I haven't telled ye the worst yet—not the worst. I can't do for ye no more now father's dead—they do all say that, an' I can't take no money from ye. I must give up this house and go into service."

Sam gazed at her with starting eyes, positively unable to articulate.

"They do all say it," sobbed Kate, "the Reverend, and Farmer Joyce, and all the neighbours. They do all say sich a thing was never heerd on as a respectable unmarried man an' a unmarried 'ooman to go on a-livin' by theirselves in the same house."

"Oh-h!" said Sam in great amazement, then a new light seemed to break in upon him.

"A unmarried man an' a unmarried 'ooman," he repeated. "If we was married they couldn't say nothin'. Well, why not?"

"Why not?" echoed Kate, and she covered her face with her hands.

Sam twitched them away and repeated his question.

"There ye don't never mean it," said poor Kate desperately. "I'd be nigh so bad as your mother if I was to take ye at your word. Why, I be pretty nigh ten year older nor you and I—I—I d' low ye'd be sure to repent it."

"I'll do nothin' o' the kind," asserted Sam. "This 'ere's the best an' happiest home I ever knowed, an' I be a-goin' to go on livin' in it. There bain't another



THE BREADWINNER

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woman in the world as 'ud ha' took me in off the side o' the road, an' shared all that she had wi' me. Why you was for makin' me eat your own egg the evenin' I first come here. D'ye think I'd ever forget that?"

Kate made no answer, but she smiled, a little faint incredulous smile that contrasted oddly with her tearful eyes.

With an impetuous movement Sam swept the money towards her.

"You'd best take care on it," he said, "same as ye did always do. Us'll pay up all what's ownin' and have a niceish bit left over to start housekeepin' on. I'll see Parson to-morrow—and there's one thing, my dear."

"What's that?" cried she, half startled, for his face was grave.

"I'm afeard ye'll have to let me buy some new socks for these be a-past mendin'."



MRS. ANGEL.

"BE you all a-cryin' in here?" said Mrs. Angel, pausing on the top step of the narrow flight of stairs, and peering in at the blacksmith's wife, who did indeed look flushed and tearful as she lay on her pillows.

A baby some three days old was wailing piteously, while a toddling sister was clinging to the blankets with small, dirty hands, and vociferating the while at the top of her voice.

"Oh, Mrs. Angel!" exclaimed the young mother, with something between a laugh and a sob, "I be so glad you've come. There! I couldn't think how ever I was to manage wi' the two of 'em. Rosie, she ha' been goin' on like that all the mornin' ever since her dada went out to the forge; she's that jealous ye'd scarce believe. She keeps axin' Sharp: 'Do *you* love me, dada?' There, she do keep up a reg'lar charm about it, an' she do keep a-pullin' the blankets till I think she'll have 'em off on the floor."

Mrs. Angel came slowly round the door, a matter of some difficulty, for it opened outwards, directly on the stairs, and her person was large. "Dear, to be sure, I don't think anybody was ever so heavy as I be," she occasionally remarked to her friends and patients.

She was certainly a very stout old lady, with a large, round, rosy face, twinkling black eyes, and hair still dark, though she was considerably past sixty. She wore a rusty black stuff dress, with a little check shawl over her shoulders, and a flat velvet bonnet which had once been violet in hue. Mrs. Angel was, in fact, the village Gamp, and shared many of the peculiarities of her illustrious prototype; but the likeness was only external, for Mrs. Angel was the most tender-hearted, good-natured creature alive. For over thirty years she had assisted at all the births which had taken place in the village, and her interest in the mothers had never diminished, nor her affection for the children, whom she considered in a certain sense her own.

She bent forward now towards little Rosie, resting a stout hand on either knee, and wagging her large head with an air of delighted mystery.

"Come, ye must give over cryin', lovey!" she exclaimed, "else ye'll be makin' poor mammie's head bad, an' what'll baby-brother do then? There, pet, there—see what Mrs. Angel have a-brought ye."

Thereupon Rosie's shrieks, which had been temporarily lulled by the advent of the newcomer, burst forth with redoubled vigour, and becoming perfectly stiff and black in the face, she poured forth a series of inarticulate remonstrances which presently resolved themselves into the words, "Not another—I 'on't have another!"

"Bless the child!" cried Mrs. Angel, dropping into a chair with a crow of laughter, "I d' 'low she thinks I've brought another baby."

Finding her worst suspicions apparently confirmed,

Rosie beat the air with chubby fists, and adjured Mrs. Angel to "Take it back—take it back to the wood—take it away!"

Even the poor little weary mother joined in the laugh, explaining that, of course, they had told the darling child that Mrs. Angel had found the baby in a wood and brought it home in her pocket. At this last word Rosie's lamentations reached their climax, and it was not until Mrs. Angel had demonstrated to her that the receptacle in question contained nothing more alarming than a muffin and a packet of peppermint drops that peace was restored.

"'Ant to get on mammie's bed," announced Rosie, sucking at one of the odiferous discs.

"An' so you shall, bless your little 'eart," said Mrs. Angel.

She lifted the child on to the bed, the patchwork counterpane suffering somewhat from the contact with her boots, but the attentive Mrs. Angel soon remedied this disaster by flicking away the fragments of caked mud with the towel which was presently to serve for the ablutions of mother and babe. Then adjuring Rosie not to put the whole peppermint into her "darling little moosy-toosy, but to suck it gradual, holdin' on to it with finger and thumb," she turned her attention to the latest arrival.

"An' how does Master Sharp find hisself this marnin'?" she asked, diving beneath the bedclothes, and extracting a very red-faced and still protesting infant. "Bless 'is little 'eart on him, how he do come on! You did ought to be proud and 'appy, Mrs. Sharp.

There, you have one of each now—so many sarts as the Queen."

The blacksmith's wife, however, appeared to be more anxious than elated. "He do cry so," she said, "I never did hear a child cry so much, Mrs. Angel."

"Ah!" rejoined Mrs. Angel, shaking her head sagaciously, "they sleeps three months or they cries three months, and I d'low this is goin' to be a cryin' one. You've got a nice bit o' fire here, I see, Mrs. Sharp."

"You said I was to keep it goin', didn't you?" returned the other, whose already fretful countenance had lengthened over the recent prophecy; "but it be mighty hot, bain't it? Sharp said he didn't think it 'ud hurt I for to have a bit o' winder open."

"Winder open!" echoed the nurse indignantly. "Winder open, an' the blessed child not three days old, an' you yourself so nesh and poorly as you can be! But there, 'tis just like a man," she added more good-humouredly, nay, speaking even with a kind of contemptuous compassion, "they've no sense, men-folk haven't. Now you just lay still, my dear, and take the world easy till you get your strength up a bit. What you do want is summat to support ye. I've a-brought a nice muffin wi' me, look-see, an' I'll toast it so soon as we get you an' darlin' baby straightened up. There's nothing so nourishin' as muffins."

"I'm sure I want keepin' up," sighed Mrs. Sharp. "He's such a big child, Mrs. Angel."

"He be, bless his 'eart on 'im," rejoined the old

woman ; "he be comin' on jist about. But don't ye go a-frettin' yourself, my dear—there's plenty o' ways o' helpin' out. There, you can give 'im a crust to suck, or a morsel o' sponge-cake. He'll soon be able to take bits of all what's goin'—won't ye, sonny ? There's Mrs. Fripp's youngest, as has a bit o' everything same as theirselves, and 'im but eight month old. His mother were a-tellin' me yesterday as he be terrible fond o' pork—more perticular salt pork."

"Ah, he'd want a bit o' nourishin'," said Mrs. Sharp ; "'tis but a poor, cross, spotty little creature."

"And what 'ud it be if 'twasn't for the good appetite he has ? That child 'ud ha' been in his grave if 'twasn't for his appetite. Now, sonny, come, we'll bath ye, and then we'll see to you, Mrs. Sharp."

The ensuing ceremonials were performed in somewhat perfunctory fashion, and were complicated by the fact of Rosie's feelings overpowering her at sight of the endearments lavished on her supplanter. At their conclusion, every one was exhausted with the exception of the prime factor, who waddled about the room, chattering with unimpaired cheerfulness.

"What you do want, my dear," she remarked, catching sight of the flushed face on the pillow, "is a little summat to strengthen ye. Haven't ye sich a thing as a drop o' sperrits ?"

"Well, there's just a little whisky in the cupboard downstairs," admitted Mrs. Sharp, "but I don't feel to want it, Mrs. Angel, thank ye. 'Tis what I do never care for."

"The leastest drap," said Mrs. Angel firmly—"the

leastest drap in your tea, just to hearten ye up. It 'ull do ye good. Be it downstairs?"

"On the bottom shelf," responded the blacksmith's wife; "but don't ye go for to take all that trouble; I do assure ye, I——"

But Mrs. Angel was already insinuating herself round the door, and had begun to descend the creaking stairs before the sentence was concluded.

She found the whisky, and, having made her way upstairs again, proceeded in her preparations for the meal. She had tranquillised Rosie with another peppermint drop, and had poured out and duly "laced" Mrs. Sharp's first cup of tea, valiantly refusing to partake of any stimulant herself—"for there was but a little left, my dear, an' you mid want it"—and was in the act of "hotting up" a second piece of muffin, when the door opened and the Lady of the Manor entered, accompanied by the Rector's wife. Entered, I say; but, as a matter of fact, they stood aghast upon the threshold, until the Rector's wife, recovering the presence of mind which seemed at first to have deserted her, darted to the window and threw it open.

Mrs. Angel rose from her knees and stood curtsying, the bit of muffin still poised upon her fork. Her face was more flushed than usual, and her dress plentifully besprinkled with ashes; nevertheless, on observing the open window, she expostulated not only with warmth, but with dignity.

"No, ma'am," said Mrs. Angel; "if you'll excuse me, I couldn't allow it. Dear baby is but a few days old. He be a-comin' on terrible. 'T 'ud be a real pity

to throw him back ; and Mrs. Sharp herself is none too strong—be you, my dear ? ”

“ Stuff and nonsense ! ” said the Rector’s wife. She was an energetic little woman, and had always disapproved of Mrs. Angel, who had a weakness for sitting at home and reading Letts’s *Almanac* on a Sunday, and who, moreover, was prodigal of pernicious advice both to mother and children on the subject of church-going.

“ Them churches is such terrible draughty places,” she would say. “ And what do poor little innocent childern want wi’ so much schoolin’ this hot weather ? Bless their little ‘earts, a deal better for ‘em to be playin’.”

“ Any doctor would tell you, I’m sure,” said the Lady of the Manor, “ that fresh air is the one thing necessary.”

Mrs. Angel deposited the fork on the table, and folded her arms, with a good-humoured smile.

“ Doctors, indeed, ma’am ! ” she exclaimed. “ If you’ll not take it as a insult in me for sayin’ so, I haven’t got no opinion o’ doctors.”

She wagged her head complacently, and the lady laughed in spite of herself.

“ It’s rather dangerous to say such things,” she remarked.

“ Well, ma’am, and that’s true ; I did ought to know my dooty better than that. But there’s no law agen *thinkin’*”—here she burst into a jolly laugh. “ A body mid think so loud as they like. Ha ! ha ! Well, what I says is, no doctor have had the experience what I’ve had. I do know what a woman feels ; an’ as for the

baby (bless his little 'eart on 'im!), I've buried eight o' my own, so I ought to know what's good for 'em. No, ma'am, if ye'll give me leave, I'll shut that winder."

But the Rector's wife, with an imperative wave of the hand, frustrated this intention.

"No, Mrs. Angel," she cried; "the atmosphere is poisonous enough as it is. Just look at the poor woman —she's quite feverish; and as for the baby, why, the child will suffocate under all those blankets."

"You'll not find no finer child anywhere," said Mrs. Angel, with, for once, some slight irritation.

She groped beneath the bedclothes for the baby, who, after the fatigue of his bath, had succumbed at length to the drowsiness which it seemed to be his constant endeavour to keep at bay. Now, however, on being suddenly roused, he lost no time in testifying to his dissatisfaction with existing conditions. Mrs. Angel patted him, dandled him, and, at length, with a murmured "Excuse me, ladies," dropped into a chair, and placed him face downwards on her lap, where his cries were momentarily extinguished.

"Bless his 'eart on 'im," she exclaimed, "he shall 'ave a drop o' cinder tea in a minute."

"Cinder tea! Of all the abominations," the Rector's wife was beginning, when she suddenly caught sight of the whisky bottle in the middle of the table. "Mrs. Angel!" she exclaimed, and stopped short for a moment, speechless with horror.

"I did think I smelt spirits," said her companion, "but I really couldn't believe——"

Poor Mrs. Angel was so much taken aback by the

disapproving gaze of the two pairs of eyes, that she momentarily forgot the baby, which immediately rolled off her lap, or rather, I should say, that inclined plane on which it was reposing. There was a general outcry, dominated by an agonised shriek from the mother.

"There, don't you take on, my dear," cried Mrs. Angel. "I've a-picked him up agen in a minute, look-see. 'Tis a thing what do often happen wi' I, being so stout, you see, and the dear childern do never seem a bit the worse for it. Babies—there! they has no bwones, so to speak. Ah! you may look at me, sonny," she went on, playfully apostrophising the baby, whom the shock had rendered for the moment voiceless. "Did a body ever see sich a knowin' little fellow? He do take notice already. You may look at me, an' you may open your little eyes, an' your blessed little moosy-toosy—I haven't got anything for 'ee, wi'out it's cinder tea."

The ladies, after a glance at each other, and another scandalised look round, withdrew, leaving Mrs. Angel, as she imagined, mistress of the situation, which she presently demonstrated by closing the window before the visitors had gone ten yards from the house.

Poor old woman, she would not have chuckled so delightedly if she had realised that in that very hour her doom was sealed. The closing of the window was the last drop in her cup of iniquity, and as the two potentates stepped away together they decided that Mrs. Angel must positively be abolished.

"I always feared she drank," said one. "Do you imagine she gave Mrs. Sharp spirits, too?"

"She was very much flushed," said the other.

"Muffin! She was regaling the unfortunate creature with muffin in a room reeking with peppermint," resumed the first speaker.

"The little girl had fallen asleep over a peppermint lozenge. Did you see her—on her mother's bed? With her boots on, by the way."

Then they fell to planning about the new district nurse who was to take Mrs. Angel's place, and had arranged about her salary and about where she was to live before they parted.

"I almost wonder, now," said the Rector's wife, "that Mrs. Angel was tolerated so long. Are you aware of her cure for a sty in the eye? Three pricks with a gooseberry thorn. And do you remember last year when there was an epidemic of mumps in the village—and also some cases of measles? We couldn't make out how it was that the mumpy children got measles, and some of the measles cases were complicated with mumps—we couldn't account for it, if you remember, because we had taken such pains to prevent the infection from spreading."

"I do recollect something," said the other. "Mrs. Angel, was it?"

"Mrs. Angel had very kindly been painting the throats of all the sufferers with a nostrum of her own. Quite innocuous, I daresay—but as she used the same brush for all her patients—"

"Oh, don't!" interrupted the Squire's wife, turning away with a little cry of horror and stopping her ears as she hastened homewards, lest some final details might reach them.

In spite of just disgust and indignation, the lady felt some reluctance to announce her fate to Mrs. Angel ; yet she was determined to inform her herself of the impending change, as she was anxious to lessen the blow as much as possible.

Mrs. Angel's house was situated at some distance from the village ; in fact, as she frequently observed, she might say she was nobody's neighbour, and at the same time she was everybody's neighbour. It was a queer little, crooked, top-heavy cottage, with sloping walls that would scarcely have held together if it had not been for the mass of creepers which clung round them, and a thatched roof with abnormally long eaves reaching almost to the ground at the rear, and sweeping upwards with a sudden curve over a small gable in front.

The old woman had finished her tea and was seated by the fire when the visitor entered ; a cat was lying on her knee, which she was affectionately stroking, and the kettle was still singing on the hob to the accompaniment of a linnet whose cage stood on the window-ledge surrounded by a bower of geraniums. Everything was cosy and cheery, and the lady paused on the doorstep with an odd sense of compunction.

"This is a honour, I'm sure, ma'am," said Mrs. Angel, rising and dropping the sleeping cat in much the same way as she had dropped the baby. "You'm quite a stranger, lately, ma'am."

She drew forward a chair, dusted it, according to the code of village etiquette, with her apron, and resumed her own seat with a beaming face. The Squire's wife felt more and more ill at ease ; nevertheless, after some

preliminary remarks, she broached the object of her visit.

"We are none of us getting younger, Mrs. Angel, and I should think you must find your work a strain upon you—so many broken nights, and then the anxiety."

"Well, I always kep' up a good 'eart," responded Mrs. Angel cheerfully. "I never was one for worritin'. A body can but do their best, an' leave the rest to the Lard."

"That's quite right, of course—but still—the fact is, Mrs. Angel, I have a proposition to make to you."

"A what, ma'am?" ejaculated Mrs. Angel, with an astonished face.

"I mean I am going to make you an offer. My husband and I—and a great many people—think you are not quite—quite equal to your responsibilities. This is a large village, and so much is required nowadays—more training, you know—more regard for—for sanitary rules—greater attention to cleanliness. In fact, we have decided to offer you a little pension, so that you can spend the rest of your days in peace and comfort. We hope to be able to get together ten shillings a week—and the Squire says you can remain in this house rent free."

She looked expectantly at Mrs. Angel, and was somewhat taken aback by her silence.

"I should think you hardly make as much as that," she resumed.

"Sometimes more an' sometimes less," said Mrs. Angel, staring at her vacantly.

"Well, then, if we take your earnings at an average, you will be no loser," said the lady, with a decided air. She seemed to think the matter settled. Then Mrs. Angel came to herself.

"I couldn't do it, ma'am," she cried resolutely. "I couldn't give up my work. I'm very thankful to you and to the Squire, but so long as I'm able to earn my own livin', I don't want to be beholden to nobody."

This was disconcerting, and the other was nonplussed for a moment; but presently recalling her self-possession, she attacked the subject from another standpoint. "You must remember," she said, "that by accepting my proposal you will find yourself provided for in your old age. You could not work for more than a few years longer in any case; besides, if you were to fall ill——"

"I've always enj'yed very good 'ealth, thanks be," rejoined Mrs. Angel. "'Tisn't the way of our family to have long illnesses. We mostly drops off sudden —many 'earty folks does, you know. No, ma'am, I don't think I'm likely to fall into poor 'ealth, and so long as the Lard do leave I life, I'd like for to go on working."

The visitor lost patience at length. "It's not a question of liking," she said, with asperity, "it's a case of *must*. You'll be obliged to retire, Mrs. Angel, whether you wish to or not, and you may just as well accept the pension which is offered to you out of kindness."

As Mrs. Angel still appeared unconvinced, the speaker continued warmly: "As a matter of fact, all

practising of women like you who are not properly certified is to be put down by law. There is a Bill before Parliament now, and, after it has passed, no one can undertake maternity cases who cannot prove herself properly qualified."

"Qualified!" ejaculated the old woman. She was standing up now, and an unusual pallor had overspread her rubicund face; her eyes were round with alarm.

"Every nurse in future will have to pass certain examinations, and to receive a certificate before she can attend maternity cases without a doctor; so you see," added the lady more kindly, "it is really much better for you to make up your mind at once. No one will think the worse of you for it."

"I didn't understand about Government," said Mrs. Angel in a shaking voice. "Of course, I've no wish to get into trouble wi' Government. I didn't think," she added forlornly, "it 'ud get so far as Parlyment." She paused, holding a finger against her trembling lip. "Well, ma'am," she said at last, "what's to be 'ull be, I d' low. There! I'll resign."

The victory was won, and yet the Squire's wife did not feel by any means elated. There could be no doubt but that she was in the right. Mrs. Angel had long set every sanitary law at defiance, and was proving less efficient and more obstinate every day; and yet as she sat down again, facing her visitor, endeavouring to conduct small talk with proper decorum, while it was evident that her heart was bursting within her, the lady felt more and more ill at ease and unhappy.

When she at length rose to take her leave she pressed Mrs. Angel's hand warmly.

"You won't—you won't take this too much to heart, will you?" she faltered.

But Mrs. Angel made no answer; she stood on her doorstep watching the visitor go down the lane with a finger still at her lip and tears gathering in her eyes.

Great was the consternation and wrath which ensued in the rustic community over which Mrs. Angel had so long reigned supreme; and when the new district nurse arrived, trim and neat and business-like, many matrons vowed that they would not allow her to cross their threshold. But again it was a case of *needs must*. First one good woman was obliged to call for her services, and then another, and each was forced to own that things were vastly more comfortable under the new order than they had been in the old. "Nurse," with her bright face, her deft ways, her persuasive advocacy of fresh air and cleanliness, soon became welcome in the homes which had sworn to shun her, and many a village slattern was coaxed into more orderly habits, and many an ailing child recovered comparative health under her beneficent rule.

Mrs. Angel, it need not be said, did not approve of her.

"There, I can't but think 'tis flyin' in the face of Providence for a nurse to go bicycling over the country," she remarked to a crony of hers, a matron of her own standing who was not likely to be attracted by new-fangled ways. "And them starched gowns what she do wear, I'm sure the cracklin' of 'em is enough to

drive any poor young delicate 'ooman silly. As for them collars and cuffs—think of any poor little hinfant layin' agen *them*, Mrs. Stickly—nasty, hard, scratchin' things. Now *I* did always wear a stuff dress, you know, what never made no noise, and my sleeves were soft enough."

"Ah! they'll be like to feel the difference," said Mrs. Stickly.

"And, my dear," continued Mrs. Angel, lowering her voice, "they do tell *I* as this here districk nurse be a unmarried 'ooman."

"E-es," rejoined the other, "she be. She be a *Miss*, though they do call her 'Nurse' and 'Sister'."

"Well, and that's a pretty thing," ejaculated her friend. "In our day, Mrs. Stickly, maids was always kep' away on sich occasions. I d' low Government don't know what it be about."

"They'll be like to find out their mistake," returned the other, shaking her head sagely.

For some time Mrs. Angel herself was of this opinion, and confidently expected a revolt against the new conditions and a return to the old. As months passed, however, and it became evident that the district nurse was an unqualified success, she fell into a state of deep depression. She missed her occupation, the importance, the never-failing excitement, her intimate relations with the matrons; above all she missed the babies in whom she had ever taken such keen interest and delight. She used to dream sometimes of the familiar pressure of a little head upon her arm, and start up, thinking she heard a child's drowsy cry. She used to

sit over her fire, and fancy herself playing with a baby's toes as she had so often done, watching the little limbs stretch out to the warmth, observing the progress made from day to day, a progress which is indeed astonishingly rapid during the first weeks of existence, and which Mrs. Angel had ever loved to exaggerate.

"How 'e do come on, bless 'is little 'eart," she would murmur to herself as she sat half dozing. Or, "Don't the blessed child take notice, ma'am?" Then she would wake up and sigh heavily, and wonder how Mrs. Whittle was getting on, and hope magnanimously that young Mrs. Stuckhey would have a good time.

One cold February day a friend met her walking stiffly down a rugged track at some distance from her home.

"Why, my dear, whatever mid you be doin' here in the Drove?" she inquired.

Mrs. Angel drew her shawl more closely round her, and laughed a little shamefacedly, as she replied: "Well, there, you see, 'tis lambin'-time, and it do seem to comfort I a bit for to sit i' the fields".

"Dear heart alive!" ejaculated the friend. "Are ye in your senses, Mrs. Angel?"

"Oh, e-es, I be in my senses right enough, but I do miss my work summat awful—there! there's days I do feel as if my 'eart 'ud break."

She sniffed and hurried away, leaving the other looking after her.

"I d' low she will break her heart, too, if she do go on frettin' like that."

But in the early spring an event occurred which,

though it was in itself sad enough, brought unlooked-for comfort into Mrs. Angel's life. Coming home late one blustering March evening, after a visit to the pasture—where, however, the lambs had become too old to retain any real interest for her—she saw a figure huddled upon her own doorstep. At first she was between two minds whether she should not turn back and seek a companion before approaching this motionless form. Gathering up her courage, however, she opened her gate and went boldly forward up the little flagged path. Closer inspection proved the figure to be that of a woman who did not raise her head or appear to notice her advent. Nevertheless, as Mrs. Angel bent over her a little cry was heard—such a cry as had so often sounded in her ears in the loneliness of the night, and, drawing aside the woman's cape, she saw that her arms held a very young babe.

"Not a week old yet, I shouldn't think!" ejaculated Mrs. Angel, examining the little creature with her professional air. "I should like to know who ever had the nursing o' *you*, poor soul!"

This last observation was addressed to the mother, whose pale face had now fallen back against the door-post; the eyes were closed, the lips parted.

"I hope to goodness she bain't dead," cried Mrs. Angel. But no; the eyelids flickered, and then opened; the eyes beneath, dim though they were, fixed themselves upon the old woman's face with an expression of agonised appeal.

"Poor soul!" cried Mrs. Angel; "poor thing, we must get ye indoor at once. You've come to the right

shop, *you* have. Dear heart alive, 'twas a sin and a shame to let you go travellin' the roads while you was no more fit for it——! There! give us the darlin' baby, love—let me take dear baby. It might get hurted while we was tryin' to shift ye. Bless its little 'eart on it, 'tis a beauty, it is, sure."

The feeble arms relaxed their grasp, but the beseeching eyes remained fixed on Mrs. Angel's face as that good woman kissed and cuddled the child.

"There, now! dere, dere, dere!" chanted Mrs. Angel in her accustomed manner; "we'll warm a drap o' milk for it immediate, we will. There! lay quiet on the sofa, my lamb, and don't you cry no more—I be goin' for to fetch mother."

She had entered the house, and now reappeared without the child.

"Now, my dear! now, love—get your arm so, over my shoulder—can you h'ist yourself up a little? Ah, poor soul! there, never mind; I be so strong as a harse—I'll manage ye. Upsy-daisy! . . . Now, then, here we be, safe and sound, and here's darlin' baby waitin' for 'ee. Ah! the poor dear—she's fainted right off!"

Mrs. Angel deposited her burden on the sofa, and at once set to work to apply restoratives, half distracted between the weak cries of the babe and the dangerous plight of the mother. A lump of sugar in a handkerchief tranquillised the infant for a moment, and Mrs. Angel, kneeling by the couch, bathed the woman's face and loosened her clothes. Such a young creature—yes, and pretty too, with a gentle, modest face; respectably dressed, though the boots were very dusty and worn.

"She've a-tramped a long way," said Mrs. Angel; "her as didn't ought to be afoot at all. Poor dear! poor dear! She do look bad. I d' low she'll not get over this."

Her fears were but too well founded, for the poor creature never regained consciousness, except for a brief interval, during which Mrs. Angel, having fed the child with warm milk, placed it in her arms, in answer to another of those piteous looks which had so moved her.

"Don't you fret, my dear," said Mrs. Angel brokenly, in answer to the mute questioning of those eyes. "I'll take care o' darlin' baby."

The poor girl passed away at dawn in Mrs. Angel's arms, her forlorn head pillowed on the broad bosom where so many little innocent heads had lain. Mrs. Angel carried the body to her bedroom, which, luckily, was on the ground floor, and laid it on her own bed. She wept many pitying tears as she performed the last sad offices. When all was finished, she stood looking down at the young face smiling on the pillow.

"You be at peace now, poor lamb," she said.

Then a sudden thought seemed to strike her. Going to an old box where she kept her treasures, she hunted up a battered, bent old ring—her own guard-ring, in fact, which her stout finger had outgrown—and slipped it on the inert left hand.

"There!" she cried; "doctors can come now and hold their inquesties, and that so soon as they like. They can't cast up at 'ee now."

The identity of the dead girl was never discovered. She was traced, indeed, as far as Weymouth ; but there the clue was lost. The strange coincidence which brought her to Mrs. Angel's door was never accounted for. Whether, overcome by increasing weakness, she had simply dragged herself beneath the porch as to a refuge, or whether she had some inkling of the personality of the owner of the house, never transpired. Mrs. Angel had her own views on the subject, and emphatically announced them when, after the funeral had been duly carried out by the parish, it was proposed that the infant should be sent to the workhouse.

"No!" she cried, almost fiercely ; "I'll keep darlin' baby. I d' low the Lard have a-sent it to I."

The Rector was somewhat astonished when Mrs. Angel requested him to christen her nursling by the name of Consolation.

"My dear woman, I never heard of such a name as that," he cried.

"That be the name I do want, sir. You know, folks do get consolation prizes when they've a-done their best and yet don't have what they did look for. That's been the case wi' I. First, I did lose eight o' my own ; the Lard did take them, and I did never complain. Then I did lose my work in this 'ere village, and all the darlin' babies what was so good as my own ; and now the A'mighty have a-sent I this consolation—and Consolation she shall be named. I can call her Connie for short," she added, relaxing from her unaccustomed seriousness.

So Connie was christened, and Connie became

thenceforth the centre of all her foster-mother's hopes and cares. She drank cinder tea on occasion, sucked crusts and sugar, and was duly promoted to "bits". Nevertheless, by some special dispensation of Providence, she survived these tender attentions, and was, in fact, the rosiest, chubbiest, healthiest child in the village.

Perhaps the proudest moment in Mrs. Angel's life was that in which the district nurse alighted from her bicycle to inspect the consolation baby. She had been struck by the pretty, cheerful picture presented by the child as it sat, leaping and crowing, in Mrs. Angel's arms, in the jessamine-covered porch.

"What a fine baby!" said Nurse, as she came, smiling, up the path.

"She be," said Mrs. Angel. "Bless her heart, she be—jist about."

The visitor stretched out her arms to take the child, but paused on perceiving that Connie was triumphantly brandishing what looked like the tail of a smoked haddock.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed; "do you see what she has got hold of?"

"Oh, 'e-es," responded Mrs. Angel proudly. "That dear child, there, she do like a bit of everything; and she can digest everything, can't ye, lovey?"

Connie chuckled, curled up her little toes, and cooed delightedly.

"There's a arm for you," proceeded Mrs. Angel; "and feel o' her here. Jist take her in your arms a minute, ma'am—miss, I should say"—this disapprovingly. "Have you ever seen a finer baby, ma'am?"

The district nurse, who was not without a sense of humour, laughed as she responded: "She certainly does you credit, Mrs. Angel".

"She do," agreed Mrs. Angel; and then, smiling broadly, she added: "The new-fangled ways may be all very well, my dear; but I d' 'low the old-fashioned ones is best."

PATCHWORK.

It's foolish work tearing things to pieces to sew 'em together again.
MAGGIE TULLIVER.

MARTHA LUPTON had been considered "wonderful house-proud" in those far-away days on which she now looked back with a mixture of pride and sorrow—the days in which she had had a house of her own and "no need to be behowden to nobry". The house, as a matter of fact, had been her husband's, but poor old Dicky Lupton had never been made "mich count on". He had been well bullied and kept in order; and Martha's neatness and cleanliness had made his life a sore burden to him. Even during his last illness the poor man had scarcely dared turn in bed for fear of rumpling sheet or pillow-case. Some of the neighbours had averred that as often as his poor feeble hand plucked at the counterpane when his end drew near, Martha, between her sobs, had possessed herself of it and carefully replaced it beneath the trimly folded clothes.

But now Dicky was no more, and all that remained of him was a framed sampler worked by his hand in youth—he had evidently been born to be henpecked—and his hat, which hung in a prominent position opposite the door; "to freeet'n tramps," Martha said, though whether tramps generally think it worth their while to

visit almshouses is a moot point. Yes, Martha now occupied one of the neat row of tiny almshouses situate near the school, and founded by the same generous benefactor more than two hundred years ago. A typical Lancashire man this must have been, open-handed, warm-hearted, but chary of words. The inscription over the school porch must surely have been characteristic : *Doce, disce vel discede.*

Martha's present home was a narrow one, it was true, consisting of two rooms which she shared with another old woman called Moggy Gill ; and in this enforced companionship lay what Martha felt to be the supreme hardship of her lot. She could put up with living on charity, having worked so hard all her life ; now that she was no longer able to "addle wage," it was clearly somebody's duty to provide for her ; therefore she pocketed her seven shillings a week without scruple, and made the most of the poor little dwelling assigned to her. But not so much as to have it to herself!—that was a trial. To be "moidered with a poor do-less creature same as Moggy"—Moggy, who could never be trusted to sweep clean, or to dust the back of a chair as well as the front, or even to fill the kettle without spilling some of its contents on the freshly raddled floor. Moggy was enough to try the patience of a saint. She was a little blear-eyed old woman, a spinster. "The men-folk knowed better nor to pick sich a poor missis as hoo'd ha' made," Martha frequently asserted ; she was rheumatic and, moreover, clumsy ; and though she and Martha had dwelt together for more than five years she had not yet begun to get into Martha's ways. Moggy

had been first in possession, but the other at once took command ; she continued to be house-proud even in her two rooms, and not only delighted in scrubbing and cleaning and polishing, but insisted that Moggy should be equally energetic.

"Share and share alike," she would say ; "you scrub floor and I'll raddle it."

So down poor old Moggy would go on her rheumatic knees, while Martha stood over her, frowning.

"I knowed ye'd never shift hearthrug," she would cry if Moggy evinced any intention of shirking the two square feet of flags occupied by a piece of patchwork, fashioned by Martha's own hands.

"I—I wur just a-comin' to it," Moggy would falter, squatting back upon her heels.

"Nay, you was for leavin' it—I see'd ye. Mind that corner now. Get clout well into't. Your fingers is all thumbs, seemin'ly."

"Never content," Moggy would groan, dropping on all-fours again.

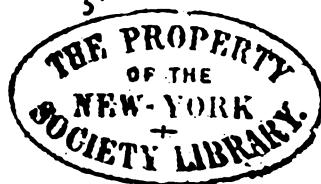
"Nay, I'm not like to be content when folks go scampin' their work that gate. You don't find no scampin' about my work. When I undertake a thing I stick to it. I undertook to make that there hearthrug, and neighbours is all agreed 'tis a pictur'."

"'Tis a pictur', too, Mrs. Lupton ; 'tis sure," Moggy would agree obsequiously, hoping to give the conversation a more agreeable turn.

"Well, then, don't ye go a-makin' little of it by layin' of it on a dirty floor," Martha would return unflinchingly.

Her achievements in the way of patchwork caused

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much tribulation to her house-mate, though she was almost as proud of them as the maker herself. Not only were both beds covered with quilts deftly fashioned out of odds and ends, but each chair had a patchwork cover, and, moreover, cushions of the same; the table-cloth was ingeniously constructed in like manner, while the hearthrug, as has been already stated, was a miracle of its kind. Martha possessed wonderfully keen eyesight for her years, and it was her delight, after her "ready-in' up" had been accomplished, to sit steadily at her sewing as long as daylight lasted. She was actually employed on the construction of a carpet, which was intended to cover the centre of the floor—a stupendous achievement to the accomplishment of which Moggy looked forward with dread; it was hard enough to avoid getting into trouble over the patchwork trophies already in existence. She was not allowed to tread upon the hearthrug, and was obliged to shake and brush her dress before sitting on a chair; woe to her, indeed, if she incautiously set down dish or cup on the table without first removing and carefully folding the cover. Sometimes she looked back with a sigh to past days, when a certain good-natured old Irishwoman had shared her abode, and they two used to sit pleasantly idle during long hours, chatting and gazing into the little street. Poor Martha would not tolerate idleness.

"Ye can't sew!" she had exclaimed with scorn on one of the early days of "but ye must knit, for sure?"

Then on Moggy's feebly shaking head, "then, I'll soon learn ye".

And in spite of Moggy's protests and many bungling mistakes, "learnt" she was, and thenceforth while Martha stitched and the pattern of the carpet grew daily more complicated, Moggy sat by the window plying her needles and sighing.

In the autumn of a certain year one of the inhabitants of the next-door cottage died, and was replaced by a woman younger and more active than any to be found in the whole little row of whitewashed dwellings—a woman so active, indeed, that she supplemented her weekly pittance by going out regularly to work.

Mrs. Rimmer, her house-mate, came in one day to comment on the astonishing fact to her neighbours.

"I don't know as I like it so very well," she remarked; "'tis awful lonesome for a body to sit all alone by theirsels all day. And when hoo come in o' neets, hoo's that tired I can scarce get a word out of her."

"But ye have the place to yoursel' all day," cried Martha and Moggy together; while the latter added with a sly grin, "an' that's summat."

"Ah, Martha viciously, "'tis summat for sure. I bry to go upsettin' your ttle now. Some folks erence betwixt straight e kettle begins o' bilin' n't in a swim."

"on hearthrug," pleaded mer with renewed envy; r steps, and could put her sort of way she fancied.

It must be pleasant, Moggy thought, to be so free as that.

"Well," said Mrs. Rimmer, poising her hands upon her hips and looking round dubiously, "I dunno; I don't howd wi' bein' always forsook like. When Mary Makin goes out of a forenoon I assure ye I feel awful lonesome. Nobry to pass the time o' day or to offer a remark of any mak' fro' morn till neet—'tis lonesome as how 'tis—an' it don't seem fair, neither. I can't seem to think hoo does her share. Hoo gets her mate where hoo works, you know, an' I have my bit o' dinner all to mysel'. Now poor Mrs. Formby, as is gone to her long home, allus went shares—our appetites was mich the same, ye know, so we jest paid butcher share and share alike, but Mary, hoo won't pay butcher nought. Hoo says hoo gats mate enough o' weekdays, and hoo doesn't fancy it o' Sundays. I don't seem to have the heart to sit down to a bit o' beef by mysel'."

"I'd be willin' to change wi' you, I know," cried Martha vehemently, "eh, dear, I would! I would that!"

Moggy said nothing, but continued to gaze speculatively at Mrs. Rimmer.

"I doubt if they'd let us change, though," returned the latter with a laugh. "The folks what puts us in 'ud be like to turn us out altogether if they thought we wasn't satisfied. Eh, dear! 'Tis the A'mighty's will I s'pose—we must each bear we're own burdens. Well, good-day to ye, neighbours."

"Good-day, Mrs. Rimmer. Ye'll jist mind that little mat yon by the door-hole; I don't mich fancy it's bein' stepped on."

"Dear o' me, no, to be sure, I reckon ye wouldn't.
'Tis a very handsome thing yon, 'tis for sure."

And making a long step, Mrs. Rimmer crossed the precious little mat and withdrew to her own quarters.

"Poor Moggy," she muttered to herself, "I never did see a body so put upon. Eh, dear ! hoo can scarce so mich as look reet ; t'other's down on her for everything. Now, I could do wi' Moggy very well—very well, I could. Hoo's as nice and quiet a creetur' as ever I comed across—I never heerd her give an ill word to nobry. And I'm sure I can't for the life of me think what manner o' good there can be in all they little mats as nobry's allowed to touch."

Meanwhile the couple next door had returned to their work in silence ; Moggy, a little sore at heart at Martha's impatient words. She needn't have made little of her before strangers, she thought. Martha stitched away with angry jerks of her thread. Some folks didn't know when they were well off. There was Mrs. Rimmer reigning in peace and solitude, able to follow her own fancy from morning to night, while her betters were tied to them that was not much more than fools. "My word ! When folks can't so mich as put kettle on fire wi'out burnin' it all o' one side and havin' it spattin' all over clean floor"—here she darted a wrathful glance at poor clumsy Moggy—"how can any one expect the place to be nice ? There's not a bit o' good in my bein' house-proud," she groaned to herself. "If I was Mrs. Rimmer now——"

The idea gradually took firmer hold of her mind, till at last the desire to change with her neighbour grew

so strong that she could scarcely eat or sleep. Her temper grew shorter than ever, and poor Moggy, becoming more nervous in consequence, blundered more frequently.

Matters came to a climax one day, when in the endeavour to avoid stepping on one of Martha's cherished mats she backed on to her own recently filled bucket, and upset its contents all over the freshly raddled floor.

Martha's language on this occasion was not only unparliamentary but passed the bounds of even cottage propriety ; such hard things, indeed, were those she said, and in such vigorous language, that Moggy sank into her own little chair in the corner and fairly sobbed behind her apron. The sound of her lamentations reached the ears of Mrs. Rimmer, who presently popped her head in at the door to inquire what was to-do.

"I can't thooal it! I can't thooal it!" wailed Moggy. "I'd sooner go to the Union. It couldn't be worse theer nor here. T' folks wouldn't be allus bargin' at a body."

"Don't ye take on, Moggy," the visitor was beginning sympathetically, when Mrs. Lupton broke in, with her face flaming.

"It's all very well to say 'Don't take on'. 'Tis enough to break a heart o' stone, it is. Jest you look at my clean floor! Hoo met be a child——"

"Well, the mischief isn't so bad when all's said and done," pleaded the other good-naturedly. "I'll soon fetch a cloth and help to sop it up. I wouldn't be so hard on the poor owd lass, Mrs. Lupton. Hoo's all of a shake, see."

"I wish you had to live wi' her," retorted the wrathful Martha. "I doubt ye'd not be for pityin' her so mich then."

"Eh, dear, I wish I did live wi' Mrs. Rimmer!" groaned Moggy. "Hoo'd have a bit more pity—hoo'd wouldn't be ever and allus saucin' an' bargin'."

"Eh, and I could do wi' you very well," said Mrs. Rimmer, touched by the tearful words. "We all have our faults, and I wouldn't be expectin' ye to have eyes at the back of your head, as how 'tis."

"Ye may have your wish then," cried Martha violently. "'Tis my wish too, I'm sure. Will ye stick to what ye've said, Mrs. Rimmer? Will ye swop houses wi' me? You're welcome to Moggy, and I'd be fain to live wi' Mary Makin, aye, that I would. I'd ax no better nor to have her out of the road all day."

"Well," said Mrs. Rimmer, a little taken aback, but laughing good-humouredly, "I don't suppose they'd let us."

"I'll go and ax leave mysel'," cried Martha eagerly. "I'll go this very minute if ye'll say the word."

"Do now, Mrs. Rimmer, love," pleaded Moggy, looking up from behind her apron. "You and me was allus very thick, and I'm sure I'd do my best to please ye. The two houses be jest same—ye should have your ch'ice o' everything."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," returned the other, still half in jest. "I'll come and wipe up the floor, as how 'tis. But we's see."

Before she had time to return with her cloth, Martha

had donned bonnet and shawl, and already gone some paces down the street.

"Dear o' me, I didn't look for to be took up quite as quick as that cooms to," said Mrs. Rimmer, looking after her with a dubious face.

"For mercy's sake don't call her back," cried Moggy piteously. "Eh, Mrs. Rimmer, if ye did but know! I'm not so very particular, the Lord knows, but hoo fair leads me the life of a dog."

"I dunno how 'twill turn out, I'm sure," said Mrs. Rimmer, still dubious. "I didn't altogether mean—Well then—" with a change of tone as poor Moggy's face fell, "if 'tis to be 'twill be, I reckon, and we must hope 'twill turn out for the best."

Martha came back triumphant; the authorities, it seemed, had been amused at the request, and had unhesitatingly granted it. Dinner was no sooner over and the things "sided" than she set about collecting her possessions and carrying them next door.

"I thought you'd give me that there quilt," hinted Moggy, as she saw Martha not only remove and fold her own counterpane, but the companion one, which had for so many years adorned her little bed.

"You hadn't no reet to think no such thing then," retorted the other, with a superabundance of negatives which Moggy felt to be conclusive. "I didn't mak' it for thee; I made it for the 'ouse."

"Oh, I see," responded Moggy faintly; and after that stood by, mutely scratching her elbows, while Martha proceeded to divest the chairs of their cushions, and remove the hearthrug and sacred doormat. The

sampler was next added to the pile of portable property, and the late Mr. Lupton's hat laid on top.

"Now I reckon all's ready," said Martha, looking anxiously round; "nay, theer's the kettle-holder—hand over, Moggy."

Moggy left off scratching her elbows and complied, looking more and more doleful; that kettle-holder had been the cause of many scoldings, for the condition of the lining had been a test of her polishing powers as regarded the kettle-handle, and as such had been daily subjected to severe inspection from Martha's keen eyes; but she was loath to let it go all the same.

"My word, the house do look wonderful bare," cried Mrs. Rimmer, appearing just as these preparations were complete. "I hadn't thought o' bringing aught fro' my place."

"I doubt ye haven't got so very mich to bring away," observed Martha, pausing, with her chin resting on the crown of her husband's hat.

"Well, I dare say I could find a good few things if I was to look," returned Mrs. Rimmer, with a startled air. "If Mrs. Lupton was going to be that havin', other folks had best look out for their reets," she opined inwardly.

"I don't believe there's nought next door as doesn't belong to the 'ouse," asserted Martha firmly. "You was never a great hand at your needle, Mrs. Rimmer."

"The tay-pot's mine, though," retorted the other excitedly, "for I paid fi'pence ha'penny at Tyrer's mysel' for't."

"Ah, but you went and broke the 'other," cried Martha triumphantly; "and that was found on the premises. You're answerable for that there tay-pot, Mrs. Rimmer."

"Goodness gracious, I never did see anybody so covetous!" exclaimed the last-named lady, raising her voice. "Tay-pot as was broke wasn't worth tuppence—that it wasn't. Spout was chipped off when I coom, and knob gone fro' the lid. I met ha' got a cheap one, but this 'ere wi' the flowers on't took my fancy like—you can take the little brown one as is here if you've a mind."

"That's mine!" said Moggy quickly; "'tis my own as I brought wi' me. I've a likin' for't, and I mun keep it."

"Well, it stands to reason I mun ha' summat to drink out on," said Mrs. Lupton, speaking as energetically as was compatible with the necessity of keeping her chin still poised on the top of the hat. "I'm to be responsible for a tay-pot o' some mak', an' a tay-pot mun be found."

"See you, Mrs. Lupton," retorted Mrs. Rimmer, "'tis to please you as I agreed to mak' this change, and if you go for to take my tay-pot off me I'll jest go my ways back again. I'm not a-goin' to be put upon all roads."

"There, take my tay-pot, Mrs. Lupton, do," cried Moggy eagerly. "It mak's beautiful tay, an' I'll reckon yo'll take good care on't. See, I'll take it over for ye—your hands is full."

"Well, 'tis a poor shabby little thing, but happen I

can do wi't," assented Martha ungraciously; and with that she marched out followed by the two others.

"Dear, Mrs. Rimmer, wherever be you a-chivyin' me to?" inquired Martha, as the late proprietress of the little cottage pushed hastily past her in order to possess herself of sundry small objects which she feared the newcomer might at once annex. "Yon cushion's fast to the chair; ye munnot carry that off."

"Raly, I'd think shame of actin' so havin'," groaned the other, who had dropped upon her knees beside the chair in question and was busily engaged in untying the string. "If 'tis fast to cheer, Mrs. Lupton, 'tis along o' my havin' teed it wi' my own hands. You've took off every single wan o' the cushions in your place. I mun ha' summat to sit on as well as yourself."

Martha was silenced for the moment, but the dispute broke out afresh over a pair of bellows, and waged hotly when a certain warming-pan came in question; in fact, had not Mrs. Rimmer reiterated her intention of renouncing the new plan, Martha would never have withdrawn her claim. As it was, the belligerents parted with flushed faces and wrathful hearts, each firmly convinced that she had had the worst of the bargain.

As the doorways of each pair of houses were situated side by side under a single whitewashed porch, the position of Martha's new room was naturally the reverse of that which the old one occupied. When seated in her chair betwixt window and fire she looked down the street instead of up; and moreover the sun came in her eyes. She felt, as she subsequently expressed it, as

if everything was left-handed like, and she was always putting the wrong foot foremost. Then her cushions did not seem to fit the chairs; her hearthrug would not lie smooth, for the tiles beneath were uneven; her doormat, she opined, "would be like to fade wi' the sun lyin' on it that hot".

She was still fidgeting about her new premises and grumbling to herself over the disgraceful way in which Mrs. Rimmer had tried to overreach her, when a heavy clogged foot was heard hammering over the cobblestones, and in another moment a tall woman's figure halted on the threshold.

"Hullo!" cried Mary Makin in amazement. "Whatever's to-do here? Wheer's Mrs. Rimmer?"

Martha hesitated; in the excitement of making the transfer both parties had momentarily forgotten the third partner in the transaction. Mrs. Lupton suddenly felt it would be a little awkward to explain matters, for the reason of the exchange had mainly been the fact of Mary's being "out o' the road all day".

"Hoo've gone next door, my dear," she returned, however, with a brisk assumption of geniality. "Ah, that's wheer hoo's gone to. Hoo've took a fancy for livin' wi' Moggy, d'ye see, and I reckoned I'd jest so soon bide here wi' you."

"Ah," returned Mary Makin indifferently, "ye'll both be like to get into trouble, won't ye?"

"Dear, no, Miss Makin," replied Martha, with her most dignified air, "'tis all agreed; I've been to ask permission."

"Sombry met ha' axed mine, I doubt," said Mary, in

rather an offended tone ; "but 'tis all same to me who lives here. I don't see mich on 'em."

"No, to be sure," agreed Martha, much relieved. "Ye'll take off clog outside, wunnot ye?"

"I'll do nought o' the kind," responded Miss Makin with spirit. "I'm not a-goin' to be ordered about in my own house. I'll take 'em off same as I've always done."

And with that—oh, horrible desecration!—she not only planted one large clog, decidedly in need of wiping, in the very centre of Martha's doormat, but proceeded to clump across the floor which Mrs. Lupton had just raddled, and to take up her position on the hearthrug itself.

"Here! Look out—mind wheer you're goin', woman!" cried the indignant Martha, shocked out of all her previous caution. "They things isn't meant to be trod on—ye met see that for yourself' if ye had e'en in your head. I reckon ye've done for that hearthrug—an' jest look what a mess ye've made on clean floor. 'Tis easy seen you're not used to dacent ways."

Mary contemptuously kicked the hearthrug out of the way. "I don't think nought at all o' sich trumpery things," she cried, "all made o' tags and rags. Wheer's we're own hearthrug?"

"Mrs. Rimmer took it wi' her," returned Martha, not ill-pleased to draw down the newcomer's wrath on that recreant one.

"I'll soon have it back, then, if that's all," retorted Miss Makin ; and out of the house she marched, every step leaving a muddy impression, and hammered vigorously on the neighbouring door.

Martha remained by her own fireside, groaning and shaking, not only with anger, but with a kind of fear—an entirely novel sensation. Never in all her life had she found any one to "stand up to her" before; and now, not only was Mary determined to stand up to her, but was evidently—so she owned to herself with a sinking heart—quite ready to trample on her, if need be.

After a moment's fierce altercation Miss Makin returned, triumphantly carrying a mat of the kind common in cottages, which she proceeded to spread in front of the fire; then, catching up Martha's treasured handiwork, turned with it towards the door.

"Wheer are ye fur?" inquired Martha, with trembling tones.

"Folks next door mun ha' summat to set afore fire," returned Mary laconically.

"Yon's mine!" shrieked Martha.

"Well, then, mak' up your mind and tak' your ch'ice," returned Miss Makin resolutely. "If ye leave it here I'll stand on't."

Either alternative seemed dreadful, and while Martha was lamenting and hesitating, Mary, who was a person of prompt action, clumped out of the cottage and threw the precious object in at her neighbour's door, which she then slammed to.

"Now, let's hear no more on't," she observed decidedly. "You've comed to live in this 'ere house without a 'by-your-leave' or 'wi'-your-leave' to me. I'm not much a-whoam, but when I am I'll thank ye to keep a civil tongue i' your head, Mrs. Lupton. I work

hard all day, and I'll have peace and comfort o' neets.
So now ye know, an' mun act accordin'."

Mary looked so big and masterful, as she stood there with her muddy feet firmly planted on the shabby rug, her expression was so fierce and her voice so loud, that, though several retorts rose to Martha's lips, she forebore to utter them, and sat down instead, suddenly and quite meekly.

Her new life had begun not very auspiciously, and her heart sank lower and lower as the days passed. Mary Makin was quite willing to accomplish a due share of work, provided she was allowed to set about it in her own way. For instance, she made no difficulty about drawing a bucket of water in the morning, but violently resented any hints about carrying it carefully and avoiding letting it "swill over". She would clean the grate, but in so noisy and careless a fashion that it was less trouble to Martha to undertake the job herself than to clean up "after her". The older woman, in fact, soon got into the way of doing everything herself, and Mary, whom she had perhaps hoped to shame by such a course, merely laughed and said, "Please yo'rsel' an' you'll please me. *I* don't want to be bothered."

Mary, in fact, wouldn't be said by nobody; she came and went as she chose, and would just as soon see the house dirty as clean. It was this which Mrs. Lupton found most lacerating to her feelings. She wouldn't have minded the work so much, though it did seem a bit hard and unfair; but that Mary didn't appreciate the result of her labours—flesh and blood could scarce

thoal that. She had mussed and crumpled her beautiful new coverlet till Martha, in high dudgeon, had removed it from her bed; she would have made the doormat a sight with mud and dirt if its owner had not prudently laid it by and replaced it with a piece of sacking, which was not only an eyesore, but a very inefficient protection to the floor. As for the way she rumpled the cushions, as Martha frequently lamented, "Hoo was war' nor any mon!"

It was true that the discomfort caused by Mary's presence only endured for a few hours out of the twenty-four; but even in her absence the time did not seem to pass very pleasantly. What was the good of making the place clean when a body knew it would be all "mucked about" at nightfall? As for going on with the carpet, could Martha ever hope to put it down in that house? Often, as she sat stitching by herself with her back to the window, for the light hurt her eyes, she would find her thoughts wandering to the hours she had spent in the company of Moggy, who was always so pleasant spoke. How she had admired the patchwork, to be sure! She had taken thought on't and been proud on't. A body might say a word to Moggy without putting her into a fury. Moggy didn't snore o' neets, neither.

"I doubt I were a bit too 'ard on her," reflected Martha many a time.

One day Mrs. Rimmer looked in.

"I reckon you're 'appy now, Mrs. Lupton," she remarked. "Dear o' me, this is a nice little place, isn't it? I can never seem to settle so well next door.

Well, ye've got it all your own way now, haven't ye?"

"Ah! I have," agreed Martha, without enthusiasm. "How's Moggy? I think hoo met ha' taken the trouble to look in. 'Tis very ill done o' her to keep away all this time, arter her an' me lived together sich a many year."

"Eh! I reckon hoo thought you'd fancy her room more nor her company," retorted the other, with a laugh. "Hoo is but a poor owd dunderhead at best o' times."

"Onybody's better nor nobry, I reckon."

The words had no sooner leaped out of Martha's lips than she repented of them; indeed, she stopped short with such a startled face as might have proved to a keen-witted observer that the sentiment they expressed was a kind of revelation to herself; but Mrs. Rimmer was not given to these niceties of observation, and merely clapped her hands with a crow of laughter.

"Eh, dear!" she exclaimed; "that's summat new! I never thought to hear you say so."

"Eh, I nobbut meant to say," returned Martha, correcting herself with dignity, "'t 'ud nobbut be manners to coom and ax how I felt mysel', and how the change was agreein' wi' me."

"Well, 'tisn't for want o' thinkin' on ye, then," returned the visitor. "'Tis fair moiderin' the way hoo goes on about ye—wonderin' this and wonderin' that. Hoo hasn't mich to say at best o' times, but when hoo does oppen mouth hoo does nothin' but clack, clack about yoursel'. Hoo fair moiders me to death, whippin'

up hearthrug if I so mich as set foot nigh't. 'Mrs. Lupton wouldn't like onybody to tread on't,' says hoo. 'I think we ought to take the same care on't as Mrs. Lupton would hersel'."

Martha's face relaxed. "Hoo's a well-meanin' poor creatur'," she observed condescendingly; "very well meanin'. But hoo met ha' dropped in to see me as how 'tis."

"I'll tell her," said Mrs. Rimmer, adding, with a grin, "How are ye gettin' on wi' Mary?"

"Well enough," returned Mrs. Lupton shortly.

"Hoo's pratty stiff-necked, isn't hoo?" went on the other, with a chuckle. "Ye'll noan find it so easy to sauce Mary as poor Moggy yon."

Mrs. Lupton threaded her needle with great precision and made no reply; and Mrs. Rimmer backed away towards the door with a sarcastic smile.

"Seems to me yo don't find yoursel' changed for the better," she remarked as she turned to cross the threshold, and was gone before Martha could respond.

Before the latter had had time to recover from her wrathful perturbation a hesitating tap came at the open door, and Moggy's stooped form insinuated itself round it.

"I heerd you was axin' for me," she began, advancing timidly.

"'Tis a wonder as ye let yoursel' be axed for," interrupted Mrs. Lupton with spirit. "You're a very great stranger, Moggy Gill."

"I was afeerd o' gettin' into your road," returned Moggy, so humbly that the other relented and smiled upon her quite affectionately.

"I'm fain to see ye as how 'tis," she said pleasantly.
"You're lookin' very well,"

"'Tis more nor I can say for you, Mrs. Lupton," returned the visitor, who had been staring at her former companion with an expression of much concern. "Eh, dear, you're sadly warsened. Eh, that you are, my dear! Whatever ha' you been doin' to yoursel'?"

"I dunno, I'm sure," replied Martha thoughtfully, "unless it's the hard work. Ye'd never think, Moggy, what work I have cleanin' up arter Mary. Hoo makes more dirt nor a mon, that hoo does," cried Martha energetically. "If our Dicky had made one-half the mess hoo does when he were wick I'd ha' taken besom to him."

"I doubt you would," agreed Moggy with conviction. "Well, but doesn't hoo do her share o' readyin' up th' place?"

"I'd sooner do it mysel'," replied Mrs. Lupton, lowering her voice. "Hoo does it so ill to begin wi', and hoo's got sich a tongue—I'm fair freetened of her. I tell you, Moggy, I'd sooner meet a boggart ony day, nor Mary in one of her tantrums."

Moggy sat aghast, feeling as though the earth were crumbling beneath her feet. Mrs. Lupton afeard!

"Well, but ye'll be killin' yoursel' this gate," she hazarded presently. "I'd reckon I'd best look in to-morrow mornin' and gie you a bit of a hand, Mrs. Lupton, soon as ever Mary's out o' the road."

"Nay, but you've got your own work to do," said Martha hesitatingly; the longing look on her face,

however, belied her words, and Moggy went on eagerly:—

“I could come easy—I could that. Mrs. Rimmer does a good bit hersel’, and hoo’s not so very particular—”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” interrupted Mrs. Lupton severely, “I’m sorry to hear Mrs. Rimmer isn’t particular. I doubt the place is but ill-done to, now, sin’ I left it. I doubt I shouldn’t know it again.”

“Very like you wouldn’t,” agreed Moggy shame-facedly.

“Well,” resumed Mrs. Lupton loftily, “t’ud happen be just so well if you *would* look in to-morrow, Moggy—I could put you in the way o’ things again—I reckon you’ll be forgettin’ all as I learnt ye wi’ so mich trouble.”

“Oh, no, I’ll not forget, Mrs. Lupton,” returned Moggy, with an ingratiating smile, “I wouldn’t be sich a ninny as to forget—but I’ll coom as how ‘tis. I could welly cry to see how wummicky you do look.”

Come she did on the following morning, and to work she set, with as much goodwill and as little discrimination as ever. To Martha’s credit be it said that she was quite tolerant of her shortcomings, and beyond an occasional “Well, to be sure!” and “Did a body ever see the like!” when Moggy made a particularly stupid mistake, did not reprimand her at all.

Indeed, at the end of Moggy’s labours, she showed such real pleasure and gratitude at the results that the little old woman was quite overcome.

“Don’t name it, Mrs. Lupton, my dear,” she cried, shaking her warmly by the hand, “’tis a real pleasure—

eh, that it is. I'd think nothin' at all o' poppin' in every day to do the same—and I will too. Now do let's set out doormat and tablecloth and all, same as in th' owd times. I can't abide to see th' place wi'out 'em."

Martha needed very little pressing to comply with this request, and smiled benignly as Moggy's admiration broke forth.

"Eh, dear, but it do look pratty! Our place, yon, dunnot look the same wi'out 'em. I can scarce fancy it *is* same. I used to feel so proud lookin' about me of an arternoon when I was sat at my knittin'."

"Well then, if that's all," returned Martha condescendingly, "you'd be very welcome to come and set here at arter dinner, and bring your knittin' wi' you."

"I will," agreed Moggy joyfully; "dear, 'tis quite a while since I did any knittin'! Mrs. Rimmer, hoo don't seem to take to the needlework mich. Well, I'll coom."

After dinner she reappeared accordingly, and for many subsequent days this mode of procedure continued. Mrs. Rimmer made no objection at first; but as day after day Moggy "popped next door to lend a hand to poor Mrs. Lupton," or "jest nipped in" for an hour or two with her knitting, she grew first sarcastic and then indignant.

"I tell ye what it is," she cried, bursting in upon the pair one afternoon as they sat contentedly opposite each other, busy each with her own piece of work. "I tell ye what 'tis, ye'd ha' showed a deal more sense if ye hadn't axed me to change houses at all."

Martha looked up from her sewing in dignified surprise.

"Eh, dear, Mrs. Rimmer, you give me quite a turn!" she exclaimed.

"Turn!" echoed Mrs. Rimmer, folding her arms at her waist and inflating her nostrils. "Talk o' turns! Ye'd best turn out o' this and let me turn in again, I reckon."

Martha dropped her patchwork and gasped; Moggy looked up mildly.

"What is it as has vexed ye?" she inquired.

"Vexed!" retorted Mrs. Rimmer. "Well I'm not to say vexed, but I'm a deal surprised—a deal I am. You, as couldn't put up wi' each other when you was together, ye must be for ever callin' out for each other now! I'm sure Mrs. Lupton sees a deal more o' you, Moggy, nor I do."

"Did ye want me, then?" inquired Moggy, rising with as much alacrity as the stiffness of her joints would allow.

"Nay," returned Mrs. Rimmer, in a somewhat mollified tone, "I don't want ye—not particular I don't; I only say there's no sense in't. If you howd so much to one another's coompany, why did ye give over livin' together? Why don't ye live together now?" she added with increasing vehemence. "Why don't ye change back, Mrs. Lupton?"

Martha and Moggy looked at each other, the same eager query in the eyes of both. Mrs. Rimmer intercepted the glance, and, being in the main a good-natured woman, burst out laughing.

"Well, to be sure!" she cried as soon as she could speak. "Eh, dear! Well I never! Well, fetch back your things, Mrs. Lupton, and I'll fetch back mine."

"Are ye sure ye don't mind?" inquired Moggy politely.

"Mind? Why, not a bit, lass. I allus liked this house best, and I reckon I'll see jest as mich o' you as I do now. *You'll* be more like to mind arter a bit," she added feelingly.

"I can mak' mysel' very well content wi' Mrs. Lupton," asserted Moggy stoutly; "very well I can—her an' me was al'ays thick, and I—I don't know the reason on't, but I don't seem able to get into onybody else's ways."

As Mrs. Rimmer vanished, still laughing, Martha turned quickly to her old crony.

"Eh, thank ye for that word, Moggy. If you can content yoursel' wi' me I can do wi' you. Eh, that I can. I don't ax for no better company. I've missed ye awful."

A WIDOW INDEED.

"IF it wasn't for the rent I could manage very well, my dear," said Mrs. Melmouth, eyeing her friend sharply through a cloud of steam, "but the rent! There! It do seem to keep a-hangin' over me all the week. Sundays is the only days I can draw my breath free, I do assure 'ee."

"Along o' bein' so hard worked, I do 'low," groaned Mrs. Joyce sympathetically.

Mrs. Melmouth slowly wrung out the small flannel petticoat which she had just removed from the tub, and eyed her meditatively.

"I *be* hard worked, jist about!" she returned. "Mondays and Toosdays washin' for Mrs. Hilton—what do never give more nor a shillin' a day and bring my own dinner—Wednesdays and Fridays Mr. Meat-yard—he do pay well enough—I have nothin' to say against *him*; Thursdays, Mrs. Marshall up to Branston;—Saturday the Rectory. That's a very wearin' job, Mrs. Joyce, along o' my bein' forced to keep so still as a mouse for fear o' disturbin' the Reverend when he be a-writin' of his sermon."

"I didn't think our parson ever wrote no noo sermons," interrupted Mrs. Joyce.

"Oh, he do, my dear, he do."

"There," persisted Mrs. Joyce, "I'm sure, he do say the same thing every Christmas reg'lar about all the mollencolly things what 'ave happened since that time last year; and every Easter he do carry on about graves in churchyard, and how, as like as not, we'll all be in 'em afore another Easter Day do come round."

"Oh, well, very like he do say the same things but he do say 'em in a different way—I *know* he do write 'em out fresh, for Mrs. Porter, there, she do come a-runnin' out if I do so much as knock brush agen the floor!—'Hush!' she do say. It be very wearin', Mrs. Joyce."

"Ah-h-h!" groaned her crony again, "I do 'low you must be glad when Sunday comes."

This remark brought back the conversation to its original starting-point.

Mrs. Melmouth took both hands out of the tub that she might gesticulate the more impressively.

"Jist about!" she repeated emphatically, "but mostly along of having paid the rent Saturday. I do breathe free Sunday, but Monday I do start again a-worritin' an' a-worritin'. With a long family, sich as mine be, Mrs. Joyce, there's no knowin' how you'll find yourself at the end o' the week. P'r'aps it's boots, and p'r'aps it's meddyccine—Florence, there, she be allus a-havin' poomonia, and sich-like, what you do have to call a doctor in for; and there's times when childern 'ull eat twice so much as other times, and I haven't the heart to stint 'em, bless 'em!—but there it is, Mrs. Joyce. The rent has to be paid whatever happens, and the question as I do keep axin' o' myself from

mornin' till night is: 'Where be I to find the money?'"

At this juncture a small boy detached himself from the group of children at the farther end of the close room, and approached his mother, wailing.

"What's the matter now?" queried the overwrought little woman, snatching him up in her arms. "What be makin' that noise for, Johnnie?"

Johnnie entered upon a long and somewhat inarticulate explanation, interrupted by many sobs. He had dropped his bread-and-butter, it seemed, butter-side downwards, and Herbert had trodden it under foot, and it was all black and "squozen up," and he was very hungry, but Florence said he mustn't have any more.

"Dear, to be sure! A body 'ud think you could manage to eat your suppers wi'out throwin' good food on the floor!" exclaimed Mrs. Melmouth. "Where's the bread-and-butter, Florence?"

Florence, a pale, sharp-featured child of twelve, produced a greasy, uninviting-looking slab, which did in truth bear out the afflicted owner's statement.

Mrs. Melmouth's usually placid face puckered as she turned it over.

"Give me a knife," she commanded, and forthwith fell to scraping it.

"Nay, Johnnie, I haven't got no more for 'ee, love. You must just make it do. Look-see, mother have got nearly all the black off now."

Johnnie burst into loud protests, and Herbert, drawing near with an interested face, observed that dada

never let them eat dirty bread. Mrs. Melmouth hesitated for a moment.

"I know he didn't, Herbert," she returned. "But there! he bain't here now, you see. Us haven't got no dada to work for us now—us must just do the best us can. Now, Johnnie, give over cryin', there's a good lad, and mother 'ull put a pinch o' sugar on the bread, look-see, and that 'ull make it taste all right."

Having duly pacified the child, she returned to her tub, sighing as she plunged her hands into the suds, and by-and-by dashing away a tear with one soapy knuckle. Mrs. Joyce, who had kept her eyes fixed on her in an unwinking stare, now observed cheerfully that if she were in Mrs. Melmouth's place she wouldn't take on.

"Wouldn't 'ee?" said Mrs. Melmouth, her pretty plump face still distorted by emotion. "If you was me I think ye would, though. You don't know what 'tis, Mrs. Joyce, you as has your 'usband and your good 'ome—you don't know what 'tis to keep on a-strugglin' and a-strugglin', and a-workin' your fingers to the bwone, and yet awakin' up every mornin' and never seemin' to get no forrader."

"Tis 'ard," agreed Mrs. Joyce dispassionately. "I don't say it bain't 'ard, Mrs. Melmouth—all I says is—frettin' won't make it no better."

"Oh! I bain't complainin'," said the widow, shaking out a small shirt with jerky movements indicative of inward irritation.

Mrs. Joyce scratched her elbow thoughtfully, and surveyed her with her head on one side; she was a

good-hearted woman, and had no wish to appear unsympathetic.

“Such a good ‘ome as you’ve a-lost so well as your good ‘usband,” she observed presently in a tone of deep feeling. “There, Melmouth was gardener up at the Court ever since you and him was married, wasn’t he?”

“Fourteen year,” said the widow.

“A lovely little house you had there, too, hadn’t ye?”

“E-es,” said Mrs. Melmouth, with a gulp.

A vision of that little house rose before her; the rose-covered walls, the porch canopied with honeysuckle, the four latticed windows, which she was careful to keep so bright, looking out into the garden; the other four looking on to the wood—that wood which, as it now seemed to her, was always green and cool and full of singing-birds. What a contrast to these two narrow rooms in the back street of the country town which was now her only home—the two rooms where she lived so ill at ease and which, nevertheless, it cost her so much to retain! Mrs. Joyce’s voice again broke in upon her thoughts.

“You be a young ‘ooman yet, my dear—very like you’ll take a second ‘usband.”

Mrs. Melmouth looked up from her tub.

“What makes ye say that?” she asked sharply.

“Oh, I’m only just a-sayin’—”

“Six childern,” went on the mother rapidly, “six childern, Mrs. Joyce—tain’t very likely as any man ‘ud go and saddle hisself wi’ they—”

“Some midn’t mind so very much,” returned Mrs. Joyce, eyeing her friend sharply, and turning her head

on one side. "There's some I d' low, as wouldn't—
Mr. Meatyard now—"

"Well?" inquired the widow, as she paused.

"He passed me by yesterday as I was standin' anigh Corn Exchange," resumed Mrs. Joyce. "An' he stops an' he turns round. 'Oh!' he says, 'you be a friend o' the Widow Melmouth's, bain't ye?' 'E-es,' I says. 'Oh!' says he, 'she be a nice plain 'ooman'—that was what he said, Mrs. Melmouth, my dear."

Mrs. Melmouth slowly drew one soapy hand through the other without speaking.

"I thought I'd say a good word for 'ee," continued the other, "so I says: 'Tis wonderful, bain't it, sir, how well Mrs. Melmouth do get on considerin' as poor Melmouth didn't make no pervision—'"

"He couldn't," interrupted Mrs. Melmouth, almost fiercely.

"Well, my dear, I'm not sayin' as he could. I'm only telling 'ee what passed between me and Mr. Meatyard. 'Her wi' all them little childern,' says I, 'tis wonderful, I'm sure.' 'How many childern have she got?' says Mr. Meatyard. So I told him six. 'Six!' says he—"

Mrs Melmouth uttered a short laugh, and turned to her washing again.

"Ye haven't heard all though," continued her friend, with a triumphant intonation. "He makes a step forrad, and then he steps back, and he says, 'Well, Mrs. Joyce,' he says, 'they be very nice childern.'"

Mrs. Melmouth's face became pink, and slowly dimpled into smiles.

"Did he say that?" she inquired.

"Them was his very words," returned Mrs. Joyce impressively. "'Well, Mrs. Joyce,' he says, 'they be very nice childern.'"

Mrs. Melmouth opened her mouth as though to speak, but, changing her mind, closed it again, and went on with her work.

"Meatyard be a-doin' very well at the mill," insinuated Mrs. Joyce.

"They say so," replied her friend.

"It must be terrible lonesome for the man all by hissel' in that girt big place," proceeded the visitor artfully.

Mrs. Melmouth hazarded no opinion on this point.

"I dessay he'd be glad enough to have a handful o' playsome boys and maids a-cheerin' up all they empty rooms," continued Mrs. Joyce.

Still the widow did not commit herself. She pushed back the man's cap which she wore on her still curly and plentiful fair hair, wrung out the last little garment and then remarked that she had finished for the night, and was just about tired.

"'Tis Johnnie's bedtime," she added. "Come here, love, and I'll undress ye."

Mrs. Joyce took the hint.

"Well, I'll be gettin' home-along," she observed. "You'll soon be ready for your bed, too, I d' low, my dear. There, keep your heart up and make the best o' yourself. I'll be lookin' out to hear a bit of noos afore long."

"Good-night," said Mrs. Melmouth.

When the door closed behind her visitor she called Florence to her, and desired her to get the little ones to bed while she went down town to pay her rent and make a few small purchases for the morrow. Having brushed her own hair, changed the cap before mentioned for a somewhat shabby sailor hat, she went to the drawer where she kept her money, and stood for some time laboriously calculating on her fingers.

Three shillings for rent, one and nine for bacon, a shilling for that last bottle of "meddycine," then the tea, sugar, soap and candles—how little, how very little of the carefully-scraped-together hoard would remain in that battered old purse when she returned! And Billy's feet were almost on the ground!

The poor charwoman looked careworn enough as she descended the narrow creaking stairs and made her way into the street; so absorbed was she in solving the difficult problem of how to make a little money go a very long way, that she almost ran against a tall stout man in the market-place.

"I was jist a-comin' to see you, Mrs. Melmouth," said Miller Meatyard.

"Was ye, sir?" returned the widow, curtsying, and glancing up shyly at his large benevolent face, which, like everything else belonging to him, was powdered with flour. His hair and lashes were white with it; the very wrinkles about mouth and eyes, and the creases in his double chin, were filled up with it.

"'E-es," cried the miller jovially, "I was jist a-comin' to see you, my dear, jist this very minute."

"Was 'ee?" said Mrs. Melmouth again.

"'E-es," replied he, with a shout of laughter as though his proposed visit was an excellent joke, "I d' low I was."

He paused and chuckled.

"To-morrow's Sunday, bain't it?"

"Sunday it be," assented the widow.

"Well then," continued Miller Meatyard, still chuckling, "how would it be if you was to bring all they youngsters o' yours to dinner at the mill to-morrow? A day out 'ud do you good, Mrs. Melmouth, an' I could like very well to see the childern."

"Could 'ee, sir?" said Mrs. Melmouth, palpitating.

"Ah, I could," returned the miller emphatically. "I could indeed. Well, you'll come?"

"Oh, 'e-es, sir, and thank ye kindly."

"That's right—I'll look out for 'ee—one sharp."

"Thank ye, sir; we'll be there."

Mr. Meatyard turned away, made a step or two after the manner described by Mrs. Joyce and then wheeled again.

"We've a-cut the mead down by the river," he remarked. "The little uns 'ull like to play in the hay, I d' low."

"You're very good I'm sure, Mr. Meatyard, but I don't think they'd look to do that—makin' such a mess, an' it bein' Sunday an' all."

"Never mind Sunday," cried the miller, with another shout of laughter. "We be goin' for to enj'y ourselves. 'The better the day, the better the deed.'"

Mr. Meatyard wagged his head with such a knowing air as he said this, and his blue eyes twinkled so archly

beneath their whitened brows, that Mrs. Melmouth became quite fluttered.

She coloured to the brim of her sailor hat, and cast down her eyes in so much confusion that she was unaware of Mr. Meatyard's desire to shake hands at parting, until he had possessed himself of the poor little sodden hand that had been scrubbing and washing all day, and pumped it solemnly up and down.

"That's agreed," said the miller, "'The better the day, the better the deed'. Oho—'tis a good sayin', that!"

He went away, still convulsed with mirth, leaving the little widow much fluttered and perturbed.

Mrs. Joyce's hint had confirmed a suspicion which had already taken shape in her own mind, and now, after the miller's words, it was impossible to doubt his intentions. "The better the day, the better the deed!" He would probably speak on the morrow.

Melmouth had not been in such a hurry. They had walked together for years and years as it now seemed to her; ever since she had left school and he had taken his first place. She remembered those walks, along the green lanes and across the downs, and beside the river. Poor Melmouth!

"I really can't stay here all night, ma'am," said the grocer irritably; "I'll thank ye to say if it's Hudson's or Sunlight soap you want——"

"Hudson's, please, sir," said Mrs. Melmouth, lifting misty eyes.

"Folks should make up their minds and be quick

about it," pursued he. "A packet, did you say? You couldn't give no more trouble, Mrs. Melmouth, if you was orderin' a hundredweight."

"Ha!" said Mrs. Melmouth to herself as she turned away, clutching her packages, "I d' 'low you'd speak more civil if ye know'd what Mr. Meatyard has in his mind." And she drew herself up proudly.

All that night, tired though she was, she lay tossing by the side of Florence, revolving the weighty question in her mind: Would Miller Meatyard speak to-morrow, and, if so, what should she say?

Never to know want again—always to have food for those little hungry mouths—boots for Billy, proper doctoring for Florence, as much bread-and-butter as Johnnie wanted—the temptation was great. But when she fell asleep at last in the summer dawn, she dreamed that she was a girl again, roaming the lanes with Melmouth.

At midday the little party duly set forth for Riverton Mill; Mrs. Melmouth and the children alike were dressed in their best, and presented a notable appearance. The widow had done wonders indeed; no one would have guessed that Florence's well-starched white frock was made out of an old print dress of her mother's which had been boiled and bleached; Billy's boots had had soles manufactured for them of brown paper, and were so well blacked that one would scarce have noticed their gaping toes, and Johnnie's clean collar atoned for the threadbare condition of his little coat. Mrs. Melmouth herself, in her decent black dress and plain hat, and with a flush of expectation

in her face, looked young and pretty enough to justify the ecstatic chuckle with which the miller greeted her.

"Well, and so here we be," he cried boisterously as he met her at the gate of his premises. "Here we be all so right as anything. Little chap's a bit tired wi' walkin' so far, bain't he?"

"Well, he is but three year old," returned the mother apologetically.

"Ah!" said Mr. Meatyard reflectively, "three year! He be the youngest, bain't he?"

Mrs. Melmouth nodded.

"Three year," repeated the miller. "Come, little man—upsy-daisy!"

He caught up the child in his stout arms, hoisted him to his shoulder, and carried him triumphantly into the house. Johnnie, recovering from his momentary consternation, made himself very much at home, and thumped the miller's proverbial white hat in token of satisfaction.

What a dinner was that which was spread in the big cool living-room! There was a noble piece of beef and two roast fowls, vegetables galore, and at a later stage a suet pudding and a fruit dumpling so bursting with its own goodness that it flowed all over the dish. These dainties were set upon the table by a stout old woman with a moody, not to say morose, expression of countenance, who listened to the children's delighted outcry and Mrs. Melmouth's timid compliments with the like stony indifference.

The jovial countenance of the master of the feast

clouded over for a moment when she departed, after depositing the dumpling on the table.

"Her and me don't so very well agree," he remarked. "There'll have to be a change here soon."

"Oh, indeed?" said Mrs. Melmouth faintly.

"E-es," returned Meatyard, with a threatening roll of the shoulders, "a man mid be a lone man and yet he midn't like to be put upon." Here he rapped the table with the handle of his knife, and looked expectantly at the widow.

"Certainly not," agreed Mrs. Melmouth diffidently.

"A man," pursued the miller, warming with the subject, "mid be a quiet sort of a man and yet he midn't like advantage to be took of him—grumblin's and growlin's at a man's ways in's own house, an' folk turnin' tilty and crossgrained for nothin' at all."

"That's too bad," commented Mrs. Melmouth.

"It *be* too bad, ma'am. Look-see—s'pose I say I'll have dinner at one o'clock—well and good. Somebody comes a-lookin' for I, or maybe I'm kep' by summat t'other side o' the farm—well—"

"Well?" echoed Mrs. Melmouth feebly.

"Be that any reason," shouted Mr. Meatyard, "for folks a-grumblin' along o' my not comin' 'ome till two o'clock? If the meat's 'ard it be my look-out, bain't it? And if taters be done to a cinder, they'm my look-out too. 'Tis bad enough for I to be forced to eat 'em, wi'out folks a-grumblin' an' a-growlin'—"

"'Tis sure," agreed Mrs. Melmouth.

"I knew you'd say so, mum," said the miller, becoming bland and placable once more. "Well, the

long and the short of it is, me and Martha yonder has agreed for to part."

"Oh! an' have ye?" returned Mrs. Melmouth nervously; "and when—when mid ye be goin' for to part, sir?"

Mr. Meatyard laid down the knife which he had been still brandishing, and turned towards her with a portentous expression:—

"It be a understood thing as Martha be to shift so soon as I do want her to. So soon as ever I do say to she: 'Martha, ye may pack up your traps an' go,' she'll do it. She'd have to go to-morrow if I was to ax her. There, the little chap be a-lookin' for some more puddin' I d' 'low. Ye'll oblige me by givin' him a good plateful, mum."

Mrs. Melmouth obeyed. She could eat little herself; it was strange to be sitting so grand and genteel in the room which she had so often scrubbed out, to be waited upon by the housekeeper under whose tyranical rule she had frequently groaned, to be treated with such deference by the master of the house, above all to think that, if she chose, comfort and plenty might be hers to the end of her days. She grew more and more silent and thoughtful as the meal progressed; the miller, on the contrary, became more cheerful and amorous; indeed, by the time his pipe was produced, his attentions became so marked that, as Mrs. Melmouth subsequently related, she "scarce knew which way to look, along o' the childern".

"You'll light it for me, won't ye, my dear?" he said, ogling her knowingly.

"If ye like," responded she.

"Mother used to light dada's pipe," exclaimed Billy.

The blackened briar almost dropped from Mrs. Melmouth's hand and she turned quite pale, but the miller was too much preoccupied to notice her emotion.

"Did she?" he cried, with a delighted laugh. "Well, there's nothing like bein' used to a thing, be there? Tell ye what, youngsters—supposin' you was all to run out an' play in the hay a bit. Little bwoys and maids be terrible fond o' playin' in the hay, I'm told—I never had none o' my own or I'd ha' know'd for certain, but I'm told they likes to go a-playin' in the hay. So cut away all on ye. Mother and me 'ull jine ye presently."

The children joyfully scampered off, and Mrs. Melmouth, having duly filled the pipe, handed it tremulously to its owner, and reseated herself on the extreme edge of her chair, feeling very nervous and ill at ease. The decisive moment had come; what should her answer be?

The miller, however, seemed in no hurry to propound the momentous question; having lighted his pipe he leaned back in his elbow-chair, puffing luxuriously, and occasionally grinning affectionately at her through the smoke wreaths.

"Ah!" he said at length, "I never had no childern, but I had a missus once."

Mrs. Melmouth mincingly responded that she had heard Mr. Meatyard had been a widower for some time.

"'E-es," rejoined the miller, "ten year. I felt 'frayed like to take a second."

"Oh," said Mrs. Melmouth as he paused.

"E-es," he resumed, "my first ventur' wasn't what you would call lucky, Mrs. Melmouth."

"Oh! and wasn't it?" said the widow, without daring to raise her eyes.

"My first ventur' wasn't lucky," he repeated with emphasis, "an' I couldn't make up my mind for to try again."

He puffed in silence for a moment or two, and then continued:—

"I thought I'd content myself wi' 'ousekeepers, but there! 'ousekeepers i' the long run be jist so bad as wives—jist every bit so—so owdacious and onreasonable. I've a-had young uns an' there was no keepin' of 'em in arder. When they didn't take up wi' some idle young chap, blowed if they didn't want to take up wi' I——"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the scandalised Mrs. Melmouth.

"As for the wold uns," went on the miller, sucking reflectively at his pipe, "well, there! You've seen Martha."

He paused, fanning away the smoke so as to contemplate Mrs. Melmouth's countenance more easily. To her intense annoyance, she felt a flush rising in her cheeks. After what seemed an interminable interval, the miller removed his pipe from his mouth and pointed at her with the stem.

"Now, I'll tell 'ee what," he said, "I've a-had my eye on you for some time."

"Have 'ee, sir?" faltered the widow,

"'E-es, there was times when I did think as I'd engage 'ee for to be my 'ousekeeper——"

Mrs. Melmouth raised her head suddenly, her face lighting up.

"But I've been a-turnin' the matter over in my mind," pursued the ardent lover, "an' I've come to the conclusion as I mid jist so well marry you as not."

"Thank 'ee, sir, I'm sure," Mrs. Melmouth was beginning, when he silenced her with a wave of his pipe.

"Some folks mid think the six childern was a drawback," he said, "but I don't. No, I could like very well to see 'em playin' about, an' they'd soon learn for to make theirselves useful, I d' 'low."

"Well, they'd do that," admitted the mother.

"And again," went on the miller, in an argumentative tone, "there's them as 'ud think it a bit foolish for a man like I to go a-takin' up wi' a poor 'ooman what hadn't so much as a pig to her name, an' what was used to get her livin' by goin' out charrin'."

"An' that's true," assented Mrs. Melmouth.

"Well, 'tis true if ye like," returned Mr. Meatyard dispassionately, "but I d' 'low I'm not like to repent, I d' 'low I bain't. You be a nice plain 'ooman, an' I'd not ax to find a better-tempered one nowhere. I've a-tried ye every way. Do you mind last week when I come walkin' up the steps what ye'd jist scrubbed, wi'out wipin' my muddy boots? I done that a-purpose," cried the miller, thumping the table with a great roar of laughter. "I done it a-purpose! Says I to myself, 'If the 'ooman 'ull stand that, she'll stand anything!'"

"I didn't think you'd be so artful, Mr. Meatyard," murmured Mrs. Melmouth, laughing too, but constrainedly.

"I'm artful enough," returned he, emphasising the statement by a deliberate wink. "That was the very day I did make up my mind. Thinks I, 'I'll ax her o' Sunday. 'The better the day, the better the deed!'" Ho! Ho! Well, shall us be called home this day week?"

Mrs. Melmouth sat quite still, pleating the skirt of her dress nervously. After waiting a moment or two the miller leant forward in his chair: "Well," he cried, "what do ye say?"

The widow raised her eyes to his face: "If you please, sir," she said, modestly but firmly, "I'd sooner be your 'ousekeeper."

"What!" cried Mr. Meatyard, utterly taken aback.

"I'd sooner be your 'ousekeeper," repeated Mrs. Melmouth. "If you'd be so good as your word, sir, an' let me an' the childern bide here, you'd find us do all in our power to give ye satisfaction. Billy is gettin' a big bwoy, and shapes very well at runnin' messages and doin' light jobs, and Florence could help me about the 'ouse, and I'd see as the little uns didn't get in your road and I'd do for 'ee, an' never want no help nor nothin', and never never grumble nor say anything to vex ye. If ye'd give me a trial, sir, I d' 'low I could please ye."

The miller lighted his pipe again and smoked for a moment or two in solemn silence; then, leaning forward again, he tapped her on the arm.

"I d' 'low ye could," he said, "but why won't ye marry me, my dear?"

The widow hesitated, coloured, and went on pleating her skirt with a tremulous hand.

"I've no wish for to change my state," she faltered at last.

Meatyard stared at her blankly, and, feeling the necessity of giving a fuller explanation, she raised her eyes to his face:—

"Bain't there summat i' th' Bible about bein' 'widows indeed'?" she said; "I d' 'low I do want to be a widow indeed."

The miller slowly straightened himself, staring at her the while with his mouth screwed up, and his eyes round with perplexity.

"Well, I'm dalled!" he exclaimed.

"I'd do my very best to make ye comfortable," urged Mrs. Melmouth. "I'd look after things proper, an' work hard, an' the childern 'ud do all they could to help, an' I'd see as they didn't give no trouble. An' —an' it 'ud be a'most the same as if we *was* married, Mr. Meatyard."

"Nay, my dear, it wouldn't be that," returned the rejected wooer disconsolately; "but if your mind's set on bidin' a widow I'll not go agen ye. There! Ye can come an' keep the 'ouse for me same as ye say, an' the sooner the better. Next week shall it be?"

"Oh! Mr. Meatyard, I don't know how to thank ye," sobbed the poor little woman. "I bless ye for it, I do indeed—an' the childern 'ull always love ye——"

"Well, well, I must be content wi' that, I suppose,"

rejoined he. "I could ha' done wi' a little love from their mother—but there! we'll say no more about that. It be all settled, and I d' low we'll get on first-rate."

He shook her hand, less boisterously, perhaps, than on greeting her, but just as warmly, and the little widow, overcome by his generosity, wept behind a corner of her shawl.

Great was the astonishment in the neighbourhood when it was discovered that the Widow Melmouth had migrated with all her little tribe to Riverton Mill, and that she was keeping house for her professed admirer without having the slightest intention of entering into the bonds of matrimony. Astonishment soon merged into condemnation. The heads of village gossips nodded portentously, and their tongues wagged furiously. Anything so bare-faced, people said, and a woman what had always kept herself so respectable! Why, the man himself asked no better than to marry her—that was the amazing part of it; nothing but Mrs. Melmouth's innate depravity could account for her conduct.

This public scandal was finally brought to the notice of the Rector, a gentle, kindly old man, a bookworm and a botanist, who liked better to administer soup than scoldings, and was more at home in examining the delicate wonders of a flower than in inquiring into the intricacies of the rustic conscience.

This was such a flagrant case, however, that he felt it his duty to remonstrate with Mrs. Melmouth, who had always been a favourite of his, and who had previously never failed to give a good example in the parish.

He was as much taken aback as the miller himself when Mrs. Melmouth modestly put forward her desire of remaining a widow indeed; and gazed at her for a moment in silence over the rim of his spectacles.

"But, my dear woman," he said at last, "do you not realise that you have taken a step which is—or at least has the appearance of being—extremely irregular? You are still young, and—ah!—are far from being unattractive, and this man is known to be deeply attached to you. Under the circumstances, and much as I respect your religious scruples——"

Here the little widow interrupted him.

"Please, sir," she said, bobbing her old-fashioned curtsy, "it isn't so much along o' bein' religious. It's jist—jist——" her voice faltered and two big tears leaped out upon her cheeks—"I can't but think as Melmouth wouldn't ha' liked it."

The villagers of Riverton were astonished on the following Sunday by a quite new sermon on the enormity of backbiting and slander, and the folly, not to say criminality, of judging from appearances.

MR. BROWN AND TILLY.

“SIGN, please !”

“Gloves, two and eleven three; handkerchiefs, six and fourpence halfpenny; lace——”

“Please, Florrie, would you mind signing? The lady has just gone across to the small wares, and said she was in a great hurry, and wanted to have her change and the parcel all ready by the time she came back.”

“I suppose she thinks nobody’s in a hurry but herself,” returned Florrie, a much-befringed young person, with a sallow face and a marvellous figure. “Do get away, Tilly; can’t you see I’m serving? Ask Miss Gunne.”

“I have asked her,” returned Tilly, almost tearfully, “but she won’t.”

“Well, ask Mr. Brown, then; it’s what he’s for.”

The bewildered neophyte glanced towards a magnificent person in a frock-coat, who was at that moment standing with his back to them, and gave a kind of gasp. “Oh, Florrie, I don’t like——”

“I’ll call him for you, if that’s all. Don’t be such a silly! Mr. Brown—*Mr. Brown*, will you come here a minute, please? Here’s my cousin doesn’t dare ask you to sign.”

Mr. Brown turned round, and came forward, laugh-

ing. He was a good-looking man of about thirty, tall and broad-shouldered, with a very fine moustache, and a pair of roguish dark eyes. He bent these eyes now on the alarmed Tilly, kindly, if somewhat quizzically, and took her book from her hand.

"I'm sure you needn't be afraid of me, Miss——? I don't think you have introduced me to your cousin, Miss Finley," he added, turning to Florrie.

"Haven't I? Well, I will, now. Mr. Brown, let me introduce you to Miss Matilda House."

"House?" echoed Mr. Brown, with a laugh, as he scrawled certain hieroglyphics at the end of the bill.

"Yes, House. It's a Dorset name—my cousin comes straight from the country; she's nice and green still, as I dare say you'd find out if you tried. Here, you may sign for me too while you're about it."

Mr. Brown ran his eye over the various items of the bill which she held out to him, scribbled his cabalistic sign, and moved away, without noticing her coquettish glance. But as he passed Tilly he paused and smiled.

"I might have known you were from the country," he remarked, gazing approvingly at the girl's fresh face, and at the fair hair, remarkable both for brilliancy and abundance, but arranged with none of the elaborateness affected by the other girls who jostled each other behind the long counters.

Tilly smiled back, sweetly and shyly, and he noticed as she glanced up that she had very pretty blue eyes.

"I feel quite lost in London," she returned, impelled to be confidential. "My cousins think me terrible stupid."

"You'll soon get used to London ways," said he. "London is a fine place, Miss House. Have you done any sight-seeing yet?"

"Not yet," returned Tilly. "My aunt is going to take me to see the waxworks when she has time."

Mr. Brown was beginning some laughing rejoinder when a new batch of customers made its appearance. and, by the time he had asked one if she was being attended to, and had directed another to the silk department, and placed a chair for a third, Tilly was serving. By-and-by, however, he chanced once more to be near the spot where she stood, and she summoned him timidly: "Would you mind signing again, please, Mr. Brown?"

"In some ways Dorset can outdo London," he murmured, as he once more bent over her.

"How do you mean?" she inquired.

"In the growing of roses," said he, with an admiring glance at her soft cheeks.

"Mr. Brown is getting quite poetical!" tittered Miss Gunne, who happened to be passing with a box full of veilings.

He feigned not to notice her, and addressed himself to Tilly:—

"There is one item here that is not quite correct. Two yards net at one and eleven three doesn't make four shillings and a halfpenny. You are doing your customer out of a whole penny!"

He altered the figures and moved away, laughing.

Tilly laughed too, and blushed.

"Aren't we affable!" remarked Miss Gunne, behind Tilly's back, to Florrie.

"For all that it means!" returned Florrie. "He generally picks up the new brooms, doesn't he?"

"He soon drops them again, though," responded Miss Gunne. She restored her drawer to its place, and strolled back to her customer, inquiring "Anything more to-day?" in a tone which signified that the answer would leave her unmoved.

Tilly did not quite understand the drift of the preceding remarks, and was, indeed, too much occupied with her anxiety to discharge her new duties in a creditable manner to have time to dwell on them. She was, however, in better spirits than she had yet been since her arrival in this bewildering new world; she began to see her way more clearly, and the solving of what had hitherto been her chief difficulty was an immense relief. Mr. Brown's good nature had put her at her ease; she would always ask him to sign, in future, and if she did make a mistake in these terrible figures she thought he would be kind about it.

She called his services into requisition several times that day, and it was remarkable that though several other young ladies made similar applications, Tilly was the only one to whom he vouchsafed a word and a smile in handing back the book.

"Mr. Brown has taken up Tilly," remarked Miss Finley to her brother and sister—who were also employed in different departments of the same establishment—as they walked home together, after shutting-up time. "Tilly's quite cocky; but she needn't be if she knew. Most of us down there

have been through the same thing—it don't mean anything."

"Don't you let yourself think there is anything particular, Tilly," advised Edith, who was "in the furs," and inclined to be consequential, owing to having been lately promoted to try on capes and boas. "There is not a girl in the front shop that he hasn't taken notice of some time or other."

"Lord, yes!" put in Bob, the brother, with a grin. "He *is* a one, Brown is—a regular right-down heartless flirt. Don't you trust him, Tilly, my dear, if you value your peace of mind."

"I'm sure I don't know why you are all going on at me," exclaimed Tilly. "I never said nothing about Mr. Brown. I am not thinking of anything, except I am very glad he doesn't mind signing for me. I used to be afraid to ask him, but I am not now."

"That's all right," commented Florrie, a little acidly. "I hope it may last. But you may depend he will be snapping your nose off soon, like he does to the rest of us—so don't raise your hopes, my dear."

Mr. Brown, however, continued to be very kind to Tilly, and when Friday evening came was even so condescending as to ask her how she intended to spend the afternoon of the morrow.

"Oh, I expect I shall stay at home with my aunt, and help her clean up," returned Tilly naively.

Her cousins had often lamented a certain countrified coarseness of speech in Tilly; thus she exclaimed "Lord ha' mercy me," when she was astonished, instead of "Good gracious!" And, in moments of

enthusiasm, prefixed a sentence with the interjection, "There!" Bob had endeavoured to correct her of this last-named habit by inquiring humorously "Where?" on these occasions; but so far had not succeeded.

If Tilly had had a particle of refinement she would no doubt have owned to "engagements at home," instead of making use of so vulgar an expression as "cleaning up". Had her elegant cousins known of it, their wrath and disgust would have been extreme.

"That sounds very dull," said Mr. Brown. "They oughtn't to make a Cinderella of you."

"Oh! they don't; they are terrible good to me. (This was another of Tilly's blunders; she would always say "terrible" instead of "awfully".) I shouldn't have got into the shop—into business, I mean—if it hadn't ha' been for them."

"But you want a holiday sometimes, surely," said he. "Come—let your aunt do without you for once, and come with me to the Pop."

"What's the Pop?" queried Tilly. She was pink up to the roots of her pretty sunny hair.

"You little innocent! have you never heard of the Saturday Pops? Concerts—Popular Concerts; you can hear the best music that is to be had for a shilling. You are fond of music, I am sure?"

"Indeed, I am," cried she. She had heard none except that produced by the church choir, or the town band, at home, but she was sure she loved it. Inviting though the prospect was, however, she would not succumb to temptation.

"I don't think I can leave my aunt," she cried.

"All the others are going out, and she is counting on me."

"I do call that a shame," cried Mr. Brown. "Mind, I shall count on you next Saturday. One of your cousins may stay at home—that will be only fair. Well, is it a bargain?"

"Oh, thank you very much," returned Tilly delightedly. "It is very kind of you, and I hope they will let me go."

"They must let you go," he responded; "I will see to that. What do you do with yourself on Sunday, by the way? Besides going to church, I mean. Do you ever go to the Park?"

Now Tilly longed to go to the Park, to see the fine people and the fine clothes, so often described by her cousins; but hitherto they had resolutely declined to take her. When she had a dress that was fit to be seen they had kindly promised to allow her to accompany them. The prospect seemed extremely remote; Tilly was indeed saving up to buy what Florrie called a "stylish frock"; but her earnings were small, and when she had paid her aunt for her board, and sent home the weekly postal order which was to help with the rent, only a very few coins remained to drop into the little tin money-box. Poor Mrs. House, struggling to keep her "long family" clothed and fed, had learned to count on the postal order; moreover, she considered her daughter's wardrobe extremely well stocked. Had she not herself chosen and helped to prepare her outfit?

Mr. Brown repeated his question, and the girl

answered hurriedly: "No, I have never been to the Park yet".

"I suppose the Miss Finleys think 'Two is company and three is none,'" said he significantly.

As a matter of fact, Edith had, on one occasion, cited the proverb in question; Tilly laughed consciously.

"Well, then, why should not we go together?" he cried. "You meet me on Sunday at half-past twelve, just at the corner, here, and I will take you to see all the smart folks parading after church."

Tilly's face lit up and then fell. What would Mr. Brown say to her poor shabby Sunday dress, so countrified in cut, so plain as to material? And her hat—why, it was only a sailor hat!

"I haven't," she stammered, "I haven't a very nice dress."

"You have a very nice face, though," laughed he. "People won't want to look much at your dress, I fancy. Well, you'll bear it in mind; you'll meet me on Sunday at twelve-thirty, and you must manage to get a day off on Saturday week."

At this moment Florrie came bustling up to know if she wasn't ever coming. It was closing time, or Tilly and Mr. Brown could not have conversed so long without interruption.

"I am just settling one or two little things with Miss House," remarked the young man. "I wanted to take her to a concert to-morrow, but she says she will be busy. However, you must let her off on Saturday week."

"Good gracious!" said Florrie, "I am sure you are

welcome to take her out whenever you like, Mr. Brown—next Saturday and this Saturday too."

"Well, but you know, Florrie," put in Tilly eagerly, "aunt said she wanted me to cl—"

"I am sure my mother would not wish to interfere with any of your arrangements," she remarked frigidly. "I am sure she would rather you never helped her at all than that you went moaning and groaning about it to people, and pretending you were ill-used."

"But I didn't, Florrie," her cousin was beginning indignantly, when Mr. Brown interposed:—

"Let there be no unpleasantness, I beg," said he. "I waive my claim for to-morrow, but not for Saturday week. And on Sunday Miss House has promised to let me take her to the Park."

"Really?" exclaimed Miss Finley, in a tone which endeavoured to combine amiability towards Mr. Brown with disapproval of Tilly's proceedings. "I generally go to the Park, too, on Sunday mornings—very likely I'll go with you."

"I think not," he replied coolly. "'Two's company and three's none,' you know!"

With an arch look at Tilly he nodded, and turned away.

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed Miss Finley, surveying her cousin with astonished disfavour, "you seem to be going pretty fast, miss!"

"Oh, don't be so cross, Florrie!" retorted Tilly, with spirit. "Why shouldn't I have a bit of fun as well as the rest of you? Edith often goes out walking with Mr. Snow, and you know, you, yourself——" She stopped

short, just in time, having been about to quote an unflattering remark of her cousin Bob's—if Florrie did not walk out with any young man, it was not, it would appear, according to him, from any lack of inclination.

"That is a very different matter," responded Miss Finley with dignity, and ignoring the interrupted phrase. "Edith is reg'larly engaged to Mr. Snow."

"I suppose," cried Tilly innocently, "she never saw anything of him before they was engaged?" And thereupon she laughed, and ran away.

That night, after much difficulty, she managed to shake out a few shillings from her little tin post-office, and on the following day expended them in purchasing a pair of new gloves, a lace collar, and some blue ribbon. The gloves were grey thread, of the same shade as her coat and skirt. When she had sewn the lace collar on the jacket she was quite pleased with its effect; it was a pity the skirt cocked up so much in front—and then, to make things worse, it dipped behind. Still, Mr. Brown had said no one would notice her dress, and if *he* did not mind Tilly felt that nothing else mattered. Her hat was the least satisfactory part of her attire, and for a moment she was tempted to borrow one from Edith, whom she thought the most good-natured of her cousins. Her own was a sailor hat of the ordinary type, and even after she had removed the black ribbon and trimmed it with the blue, arranging the ends in a big bow in front, it betrayed its origin. Edith entered the room just as she was finishing, and was loud in condemnation.

"Such taste I never saw!" she exclaimed. "Why,

the only bit of style there is about a sailor hat is its plainness. My goodness! I never saw such an object. You are a nice figure to go out walking with gentlemen!"

At this Tilly altered her mind with regard to the good-natured qualities of her cousin, and resolved that she would die rather than be beholden to her.

Next day, in spite of Edith's strictures, it appeared to Tilly that her hat looked rather well. The colour of the ribbon, in fact, accentuated the blue of her eyes, and seemed to enhance the brightness of her hair. As for the "tailor-made," though it was badly cut, the tint was soft and pretty, and the face of the wearer was in truth so bright and blooming that few people would have cared to notice the deficiencies of her attire.

Mr. Brown kept his appointment very punctually, and Tilly scarcely knew whether to be more proud or shy as she walked away beside him.

But what a world of wonder was that to which he soon introduced her! Tilly was in doubt as to which to admire most—the beautiful dresses, or the beautiful ladies who wore them. There were a great many fine gentlemen, too; but, in her eyes, Mr. Brown himself looked quite as well as any of them.

She was much struck with the blossoming shrubs and the beautiful flowers, some of these even growing in the grass; and before they went home Mr. Brown took her down to the water, and showed her the swans and the ducks, and all manner of curious little aquatic birds. He parted from her at her aunt's door, remind-

ing her of her promise of going with him to the "Pop" on the following Saturday.

"And next Sunday we'll go out again, perhaps," he said, as he pressed her hand.

Tilly was late for dinner, ~~and~~ was well scolded by her aunt in consequence, and a good deal jeered at by her cousins; but ~~so~~ well wrapped up was she in her new happiness that all shafts fell harmless.

"He's going to take me out again, next Sunday," she announced, with eyes shining above her pink cheeks.

"I wonder if that's right," said Mrs. Finley, laying down her knife and fork.

Florrie pursed up her lips and shook her head, and Edith, secure in the possession of her own admirer, remarked severely that it wasn't every man that was to be trusted. Only Bob, who was a good-natured fellow in the main, and who was touched at Tilly's look of alarm, took her part.

"Nonsense, old lady! Brown's all right. Don't spoil sport."

Bob happened to be his mother's favourite, and she relaxed at this appeal; but deemed it her duty, not only to warn Tilly herself, as to the necessity of being extremely prudent, but to drop a hint to Tilly's mother.

Mrs. House was less alarmed than might have been expected; according to country notions, there was nothing so very dreadful in the fact of a young man "walking out" with a young girl on Sundays, even without ulterior views; provided, of course, that the young man was respectable, and that they did not stay out after dark. She resolved to write to her daughter

insisting on attention to these points, but as the last of the winter stock of pigs happened to be killed that week, and she was in consequence particularly busy, the letter was not written until Sunday, or posted till the following morning.

Meanwhile two more outings fell to Tilly's share—two afternoons of dreamlike happiness. First came the concert. She and Mr. Brown proceeded to St. James's Hall on the top of a 'bus. Tilly had never enjoyed anything so much in her life as "that beautiful ride," as she termed it. It was a fine, bright May day; the streets were crowded with gaily dressed people, the shop windows in themselves were sights to see. Tilly had not hitherto penetrated so far into the West End, and her amazement and delight knew no bounds. She chattered ceaselessly all the way; Mr. Brown benevolently inclining his ear so as to catch what she said through the tumult of the streets.

Then, when they found themselves in the vast Hall, how Tilly's heart beat! What crowds and crowds of people were there, and what a big place it was, and how expectant every one looked. She felt almost as though she were in church.

It is doubtful how much she understood of the Beethoven Quartet, the Mozart Variations, or the Handel Fugue; all were equally beautiful in her opinion, and in any case the mere glory of sitting next to Mr. Brown, and being taken care of and patronised by him, was enough to uplift her to the seventh heaven.

It was over too soon, but they walked back all the way, Tilly leaning on Mr. Brown's arm, because, as he

explained, he was thus enabled to look after her better at the crossings. He arranged, to take her out on the following day at half-past two.

"Then you needn't worry about being late for dinner," he said. "I shan't take you to the fashionable end of the Park this time; I want to have you all to myself. We'll go to a quiet part of Kensington Gardens and sit under the trees."

Tilly agreed, with a beating heart. On reaching home she was a little more silent than on the previous Sunday, and had learnt sufficient worldly wisdom to keep back Mr. Brown's explanation as to why he had arranged to take her out in the afternoon, instead of before dinner.

She could hardly sleep that night, and was up at dawn, rushing to the window to see if it were fine. It would be too dreadful if it rained.

The Fates were propitious—it was quite fine; a little dull to begin with, but, as the day advanced, the sun came out, and the sky was as blue as the skies of Dorset.

Tilly's eyes shone like stars as she descried Mr. Brown's fine, broad-shouldered figure coming jauntily down the street. She scarcely knew herself what a rapture of welcome was in her face; but he took note of it, and his voice was not quite as steady as usual as he greeted her. What a wonderful thing it was to find herself walking over the grass with Mr. Brown, and presently sitting beside him under a big tree—a tree so big that, when they had moved their chairs round to the farther side, its blackened trunk completely hid them

from view. The leaves overhead were not yet fully expanded, and for that reason more delicately green. There was actually a thrush singing, for all the world as though they were in the country, and pigeons were cooing somewhere in their near neighbourhood.

Mr. Brown took out a cigarette and asked Tilly's permission to smoke, which she thought extremely kind and polite of him.

"Now you are to talk to me," he said. "I am going to smoke and enjoy myself, and you are to entertain me."

"What am I to talk about?" inquired she, a little alarmed.

"Oh, anything you like; it doesn't matter. Listen to that thrush there. We don't know what he is singing about, but we like to hear the sound of his voice. I like to hear the sound of *your* voice."

Tilly blushed; and said hurriedly: "You'd soon get to know what he was singing about if you lived in the country. There! the birds do talk so plain as Christians sometimes. There's a thrush what builds year after year in our garden. Soon as ever February comes he begins a-calling 'Judy! Judy!' and then he says 'Kiss me quick!' 'Kiss me quick!' so then I know they'll soon be pairing."

"A very sensible bird," commented Mr. Brown, gazing at her between half-closed eyes. "He knows what he wants, doesn't he?"

"Yes, indeed," agreed Tilly, rather hastily. "The robins, too—they have quite a different song when they are courting—quite soft and low, and down in their throats. There's lots of birds at our place."

She went on prattling about home, and her brothers and sisters, and the neighbours, and the big green fields that stretched down to the river, and the woods full of primroses and little daffodils and "enemies"; and how she and some of the other girls used to gather basketsful of them.

Mr. Brown listened, and laughed, and helped her on by an occasional word, and said to himself that she had the prettiest and most innocent face in the world, and the sweetest voice.

"I don't much hold with picking bluebells, though," proceeded Tilly. "They never look so pretty in a vase. I like to see them growing; they must be all blooming away beautiful down near us now;" and she heaved the ghost of a sigh.

"I'll take you to see them blooming next Saturday, if you like," said Mr. Brown. "I'll take you to Kew Gardens. There is a wood full of them there. It's no distance by train."

"By train?" she echoed, half in doubt, half in delight.

"Yes; it will be all right. I'll take you."

He threw away the last of a succession of cigarettes, and leaned forward, looking at her with a curious expression.

"Which have you enjoyed the most?" he inquired; "last Sunday or this one? I haven't done anything to amuse you to-day, have I? I was selfish, you see; I chose what *I* should enjoy most."

"I enjoyed it too," cried she; "I enjoyed it much more than last Sunday."

"What, sitting under a tree!" cried he. "Why, you could do that in Dorsetshire."

"Ah, but——" she was beginning eagerly, but broke off, stammering.

"If you liked it," said he, in a low voice, "I think it must be because you like me a little. Do you like me, Tilly?"

If ever a pair of blue eyes expressed guileless and unmistakable adoration, those eyes were Tilly's. She was not in the least aware of how much more they said than that faltering tongue of hers, which made several abortive attempts to speak. Mr. Brown's own eyes looked very kind as their gaze met, but he did not press Tilly further, merely observing presently, in a gay tone, that he was glad the experiment had been so successful, and that they must often repeat it.

Tilly laughed aloud when her mother's letter arrived; if she only knew! She wrote a reply couched in mysterious terms, describing Mr. Brown's person and position with enthusiasm, gratefully relating his various acts of kindness to her, hinting that she could not help seeing it was "rather particular," and holding out hopes of communicating a great piece of news before long.

How the days crawled that week, and how often Tilly's little wits went wool-gathering! If Mr. Brown had not been at hand to advise and help her she might possibly have got into trouble. But he, of all people, could not fail to be tolerant of errors which arose from the delirious prospect of that afternoon at Kew Gardens.

"I can't help thinking of Saturday," she whispered on one occasion when her farthings had gone all wrong.

"I am always thinking of it, too," said he.

Tilly could hardly credit it. That he—that *Mr. Brown*, whom every one thought so highly of, should be almost as much excited as herself. That he should care for her like that; for her, Tilly, whom every one said was so stupid and so countryfied. The glory and wonder of it turned her dizzy.

Her happiness had been advancing *in crescendo* from week to week, and on the particular Saturday that she and Mr. Brown betook themselves to Kew Gardens, it reached its culminating point. She could not conceive a higher pinnacle of bliss than that to which she was then uplifted. The weather was perfect; indeed she seemed to exercise a beneficent influence, so Mr. Brown declared, over it; on each occasion that he had taken her out there were blue skies and sunshine. Then the flowers, and the beautiful smooth lawns, and the trees, and best of all the bluebell wood. It might have been a country wood, only it was twenty times handsomer, Tilly said.

They found a bench in a retired spot, well sheltered from the breeze, whence they could gaze their fill on the drift of blue stretching away beneath the trees, shining with a kind of silvery radiance where the sun filtered through, taking wonderful tints of lilac, and slate grey, and ultramarine in the shadows. Mr. Brown's arm rested on the back of the bench immediately behind Tilly, his eyes looked down at her very tenderly whenever she ventured to raise her own; she was too happy to speak much, and he, too, was at first so silent that it made her feel shy.

All at once a thrush began to sing, and Mr. Brown, after listening for a moment or two, laughed under his breath.

"You are wrong in one thing," said he; "he is not calling *Judy*! It sounds much more like *Tilly*! Yes—listen to him! he is certainly calling *Tilly*! *Tilly*! . . . You were right about the rest though; he is saying *Kiss me quick!* *Kiss me quick!*"

Tilly gazed steadfastly on the path, making little designs on the gravel with the point of her shoe. Mr. Brown bent towards her, and the hand which had rested upon the bench was suddenly laid lightly on her shoulder.

"Tilly, Tilly," he said, "can you not fancy that I am a thrush?"

Tilly raised her eyes, full of that innocent worship of which she herself was unconscious, but which he ever found intoxicating; no one can tell what might have happened in another moment had not the sound of rapidly advancing footsteps suddenly made them start apart.

There is presumably a fate about such things; Tilly subsequently thought it was perhaps a kind fate which brought about the interruption at this particular moment, an interruption, as it soon transpired, caused by acquaintances of Mr. Brown's. The couple who now came in view proved to be the chief cashier of "the Establishment," and "Madame," head of the millinery department. Mr. Brown rose as they approached, and stepped forward to greet them; Tilly, whose social status was much too insignificant to have

ever brought her into contact with these important people, sat still in her corner of the bench, with her head drooping, so that the palpably home-made blue bow of the despised sailor hat was well in evidence. Perhaps it was the contempt naturally evoked by the blue bow, or perhaps it was the recollection of sundry attentions on the part of Mr. Brown in bygone days, which caused Madame to address him in so sarcastic a tone:—

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Mr. Brown? I am afraid we have been indiscreet! Really, it’s so difficult to know with you when *not* to appear at the wrong moment. Who would have expected to meet you here? I suppose you thought it nice and safe.”

“Bless you, no,” interrupted the chief cashier, before Mr. Brown could reply. “He is doing it on the square this time—it’s been going on openly I hear—a regular case—serious, isn’t it, Brown? Ha-ha, the old bird is caught at last!”

“Not really?” exclaimed Madame. And, turning, she swept a glance over Tilly from the top of the objectionable bow to the toe of her little country shoe. “Not really?” she repeated in a tone of mingled disgust and amusement.

“Come, I am not going to be brought to book like this,” returned Mr. Brown, with rather a forced laugh. “I don’t ask you why you are walking here with Mr. Philips.”

“Oh, you may ask if you like,” retorted she. “Mr. Philips and I are walking here because we are going to be married very shortly, and want to talk over our

plans. I can hardly believe that your reason is the same."

Once more the disdainful glance covered the shabby little figure on the bench. But Tilly had raised her head now, and was gazing steadfastly at Mr. Brown. Surely he would speak out like a man, and say that the reason *was* the same, and they, too, were to be married very shortly. What else could he say? Had he not asked her if she liked him? Was it not almost settled a few moments ago? But, even as she gazed, the man looked back at her sharply, almost angrily; yet when he spoke he laughed:—

"Miss House and I are not so foolish as to imagine we can't make an **expedition** together without thinking of such serious matters," he returned. "We are both too much up-to-date for that sort of thing. We have come out to amuse ourselves, haven't we, Miss House?"

"Of course," answered Tilly, with a brave attempt at a laugh. There was an immense lump in her throat, but she managed to bring out the words quite clearly, and the laugh was a very creditable imitation.

"Well, that's one way of looking at things," said Madame; and the chief cashier raised his eyebrows and laughed too; and then they both walked on, and Mr. Brown came back to the bench.

"What stupid people!" he remarked. "They might have had more sense than to interrupt us like that. What were we talking about?"

He was trying to speak pleasantly, but did not seem at ease. Tilly sat with her eyes cast down, and her

hands tightly squeezed together; she was praying inwardly with all her strength that she might not break down. She must not let him think she cared; she must not cry, whatever happened. Surely God would not let her disgrace herself by crying!

“What were we talking about?” repeated Mr. Brown. “Something very interesting, I know.”

He was bending forward again, and his hand was creeping along the back of the bench. Tilly moved away sharply, and turned her blue eyes upon him, all ablaze with indignation. He withdrew his arm with a discomfited air.

“Come, you are not going to turn out a prude at this time of day?”

“I don’t know what you mean by that,” said Tilly, finding her voice all at once; “but I never was one as—as liked making free.”

Her cheeks were flaming, but she had never looked so pretty in her life.

“Now you are angry with me,” said he, really moved.

“Angry? Not at all!” quoth she; and then she jumped up. “I am getting rather chilly, though. Shan’t we go on and see the rest of the place? I want to see the inside of those glass-houses.”

“It’s so hot in there,” murmured he.

“Well, you can stay outside,” she returned.

Mr. Brown gazed at her in amazement, which increased as they set off towards the greenhouses. Tilly walked a little in front of him, steadily refusing to take his arm.

"There are no crossings here, you know," she said, with a laugh that sounded quite genuine.

"Who would have thought the girl had such pluck?" said Mr. Brown to himself. Or was she trying to pay him out? Two could play at that game. So, when Tilly made polite, curt remarks about the weather, he responded in the same tone; and when she again proposed that he should remain outside while she inspected the greenhouses, he replied that he *was* rather tempted to have a smoke. Tilly went in alone, and wandered among the exotics with a bursting heart; and he lounged about and smoked moodily, and vowed to himself that the little chit was not worth worrying about.

When she came out she asked if it was not time to think of going home, and he assented promptly; and when they parted at her aunt's door nothing was said about meeting on the morrow.

"It's all over," thought Tilly; "all over! I was a fool to trust him. The others were right; but I shan't tell them they were."

Therefore, when her cousins rallied her on her weary look and want of appetite, she would own to nothing more than a bit of a headache.

"It's those hot-houses, I think," said she. "Dear! it was hot in there! And then we walked about such a lot. We *did* walk!"

"Think of that!" remarked Bob jocosely. "I dare say you will be too tired to go out with Mr. Brown tomorrow."

"I dare say I shall," returned Tilly, to every one's

immense surprise ; and then she went up to her room. How she longed to indulge in a good cry ! Those choked-back tears seemed to be suffocating her ; but she would not go to bed a moment before her customary time ; she would do nothing to excite remark.

"I don't want them crowding over me and saying they told me how 'twould be," thought she ; and she took off her hat and jacket, and smoothed her hair, and brought down a bit of sewing. When at last she went up to bed, and was free to weep, behold, no tears came ! As she unfastened her waistband a little nosegay dropped out, which Mr. Brown had given her, and when she picked it up the faint smell of the dying flowers turned her sick. She threw them away from her and fell sideways against the bed, an almost unbearable sense of love and longing overwhelming her.

"Oh, my God !" cried poor Tilly, as she buried her face in her hands.

Not one wink of sleep did she have that night, and in the morning, long before her cousins were astir, she got up and wrote to her mother.

"I find I made a mistake," said she ; "I shan't have any news to tell you. It was all a bit of nonsense. I believe London gentlemen are like that. You may be sure I won't get taken in again. But, dear mother, I should so like to come home, I don't like London. I wouldn't mind what I did at home. I could easy earn a bit some other way."

"Gracious, child !" exclaimed her aunt, as she came downstairs, "you are a sight this morning ! You look as if you had been up all night."

"I was too tired to sleep, I think," returned Tilly with that new artificial little laugh of hers.

In spite of her valiant efforts to eat her breakfast as usual, she could not manage it; the food was like sawdust in her mouth.

"Too tired to eat too, eh?" queried Bob.

She made no answer, and feigned not to notice the nods and winks and whisperings which passed from one member of the family to another.

How she got through the day she scarcely knew; she went to church twice, and passed the hours between in her own room, thinking over and over the events of yesterday, until her brain seemed on fire. She could not bear to dwell on the blissful hour which had passed before the interruption came; she thanked Heaven for the interruption—so she told herself fiercely, several times. If those people had not come up just then she would have gone on believing in Mr. Brown, and loving him, like the fool that she was. She might even have owned her love—she had nearly done so more than once; she might actually have permitted that kiss for which he had been petitioning when his friends appeared. Her cheeks burnt at the recollection. How could she guess that he was simply playing with her, laughing in his sleeve at her foolish confidence?

Her heart beat with suffocating quickness when, as she took her place behind the counter on the following morning, Mr. Brown walked past her.

"Good-morning," he said coldly, and then, half-wheeling round, as though struck by a sudden thought:

"I hope you are not tired after the expedition on Saturday?"

"I was rather tired," returned she. And he walked on.

"That settles it," she said to herself; even the pretence of friendship was to be at an end.

Well, he would not need to give the hint to her twice. She, too, would treat him with common civility, and no more.

As time went on Tilly grew pale and silent, and Mr. Brown's friends voted him morose and disagreeable.

One day, when the facetious Miss Gunne happened to be rallying him on this point, Florrie chimed in:—

"Don't you bother Mr. Brown. Tilly and he have had a quarrel—that's what's the matter."

"Nonsense!" cried Tilly, with a flaming face.

"Well, why don't you eat, pray? And why have you never a word to throw at one? And why do you go tossing about at night, instead of sleeping? I can hear your bed creaking through the wall."

"I suppose everybody has toothache sometimes," responded Tilly, moving away towards the end of the counter, where she became very busy with some pieces of lace.

"I should have said heartache was more likely," said Miss Gunne, with a giggle. "We all know your little ways, Mr. Brown. It wasn't fair to try them on with her, though—she wasn't up to you."

"But that doesn't explain why Mr. Brown is so glum," cried Florrie. "I really believe he *has* been hit this time, and that they have quarrelled, as I say."

"Nothing of the kind," returned Mr. Brown; "Miss House and I have always been the best of friends."

Tilly did not raise her head, but he saw her lip give a little quiver, and felt a sudden pang. Two or three times, as he moved about, he stole a glance at her. She had certainly grown paler, and the lines of her face were sharper. He thought of Florrie's speech, and then he thought of the quivering lip, and each time with a contraction of the heart. Towards evening he found a chance of speaking to her alone, and came up to her, actuated by he knew not what irresistible impulse.

"Tilly, do you still bear malice? Are we never to be real friends again?"

She looked back at him steadily and scornfully. "Never, if I can help it," she said, and turned away.

"Oh, very well," retorted Mr. Brown, assuming a jaunty air. "It's quite right. One just likes to know how one stands."

Next day all his good humour appeared to be restored; he was amiability itself to the various young ladies who approached him; smiled, and cracked small jokes, as he signed their books, and made himself altogether extremely agreeable. It was noticed that he was particularly attentive to a newcomer, a pretty brunette, with lively manners and a villainous cockney accent. As time went on he became more and more devoted to her, and, as she happened to belong to the same department as Tilly, the growing attachment was forced upon her notice. The poor child was under torture. Though she might tell herself fifty times a

day that she hated Mr. Brown, that she had done with him, and that it did not matter to her with whom he "took up," she knew in her heart that she lied. It was agony to see the glance that passed her by so indifferently, rest tenderly upon the pretty girl a yard away; to intercept fragments of conversation, which hinted at private jokes, repeated meetings, projects for the future. It was galling beyond words to overhear her neighbours' comments, and to guess at their curiosity with regard to her feelings.

"Didn't I say it was always a case of new brooms with him?" remarked Miss Gunne to Florrie one day; and Tilly felt the significant glances which they exchanged behind her back. She, too, had been a new broom in her day; taken up and played with, and then tossed away into the dust.

She looked forward feverishly to her mother's letter, hoping it would give her permission to leave London and return home; but Mrs. House being, as usual, busy, delayed to write for some time.

At last, however, the answer came. Tilly was scolded for being foolish, advised to be more careful in future, and desired to stick to her work, and not to allow her mother to hear any more nonsense about giving up her good situation.

Tilly felt sick at heart; how was she to go on with this hateful life? How was she to bear meeting that man day after day, hearing his voice, his step, intercepting his smiles, gay and tender, but never meant for her.

She dragged herself slowly to her post, feeling more

weary even than usual. A strange sense of dizziness and heaviness was upon her, which she strove in vain to shake off; voices and footsteps appeared to come from a long distance, and she heard, as in a dream, Mr. Brown and his new charmer talking confidentially together.

All at once a phrase of his pierced through this nightmare-like oppression, and stabbed her to the heart.

"Shall it be Kew, this time?"

"Kew!"

Something seemed to snap in Tilly's brain; she fell sideways against her neighbour, and slipped past her to the ground.

"Hallo! what's the matter?" cried Florrie. "She is in a dead faint, I believe."

The girls came crowding up, but before any of them could raise her, Mr. Brown did what he had never done before in his life—he jumped over the counter.

"Don't touch her," he cried hoarsely, "don't touch her anybody. Leave her to me!"

In a moment he had lifted her, her head falling back over his arm, the pretty loosened hair flowing over his sleeve. His heart stood still. She looked as if she were dead. If she should be dead—if Tilly should be dead!

Scarcely knowing what he did he hurried with her to the back of the shop and down a passage, followed by several of the girls, and presently encountered Madame of the millinery department.

"What's this? A faint? Here—take her in here and let her get the air."

She threw open the door of a small room filled with packing-cases and bandboxes, and flung open the window. One glance from Tilly's waxen face to Mr. Brown's distracted one revealed the state of affairs.

"Now all you girls bundle out," she cried imperatively; "there's no use in your crowding round. She wants all the air she can get; leave her to me."

"Come along, Mr. Brown," said some one officiously.

"No; Mr. Brown had better stay in case I want anything."

She closed the door and came back to his side. "Lay her down flat on the ground, Mr. Brown—quite flat. You needn't be in such a state of mind—girls often faint. This is the girl who was with you at Kew Gardens, isn't it? You pretended there was nothing serious. Why didn't you own up like a man?"

"Because I was a lying sneak, I suppose," returned he.

"What language! This *is* the future Mrs. Brown, though, isn't it?"

"If she will have me," groaned he miserably. "If she lives," he added, catching his breath; "she doesn't seem to be coming round a bit."

Madame loosened the girl's collar, and the sweet, youthful curves of chin and throat lay revealed, chiselled as though in marble. As she lay there, helpless, on the dusty floor, she looked pathetic enough to touch a harder heart than Madame's.

"I wish she'd come to," she murmured anxiously. "Open the window a bit wider; pick up that 'bottle of salts I dropped. Now, look here, just slap the inside

of that hand near you, smartly, as I am doing to this one."

Mr. Brown knelt down in the dust again, and lifted Tilly's inert hand ; then he looked up reproachfully.

"I couldn't do it," he said ; "I couldn't slap her dear little hand !"

"You could only break her dear little heart, eh ?" remarked Madame.

"Oh, don't !" he cried. "People die of broken hearts sometimes, don't they ? I believe she *is* dead —I believe I have killed her. I'll go and hang myself !"

"Nonsense, nonsense !" returned Madame, good-naturedly ; "she's coming round all right. See, her eyelids are quivering. Let us try the salts again. That's enough"—as Tilly heaved a little sigh. "Now I am going to leave her to you, Mr. Brown. Keep your wits about you, and tell her a few of the things you have been telling me. They will do her more good than smelling-salts."

Tilly's eyes opened vacantly at first, then glanced wonderingly round ; then, when she discovered that her head was resting on Mr. Brown's arm, and that he was bending over her, a look of pain and terror came into them.

"Oh, Tilly, Tilly !" he murmured in a choked voice. "I am so sorry."

Tilly's white lips moved with difficulty, and she made an effort to raise herself.

"I don't want your pity," she said faintly. "Let me go !"

He helped her to sit up, and then withdrew his arm ; but remained kneeling beside her, amid the dusty band-boxes.

“ It isn’t pity,” he said, “ it’s love. I have loved you all the time, Tilly, though I have been such a coward and such a fool. I thought I could do without you, but I can’t. I have been nearly mad all this time. Oh, darling Tilly, do forgive me, and say you will be my little wife.”

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away, looking at him with dilated eyes.

“ You’ve been—terrible cruel ! ” she said.

“ I have been a brute beast,” cried he, with sudden despair. “ I see it’s all over—you can’t love me any more—you can’t bring yourself to forgive me. Well, it serves me right—it is my own fault that you have left off caring for me.”

“ I—didn’t say that ! ” faltered Tilly. “ I don’t believe I ever could,” she added, with a sob that shook her from head to foot.

And then, being still very weak, she swayed a little, and Mr. Brown caught her in his arms.

CWORTIN' CORNER.

IT was Sunday—the first Sunday in June, sunny as a June day ought to be, and usually contrives to be in genial Dorset; yet Mrs. Ford's door was fast closed, and Louie sat in a dark corner as though it were winter. Nevertheless, her blue eyes wandered ever and anon from the ill-printed page of the penny periodical which she was ostensibly reading to the small-paned window, framed in honeysuckle, through which she caught a glimpse of the glowing outside world. First, their own tiny patch of garden, with the one flaming paeony bush that seemed to lord it over the more modest glories of "ladies' lockets," "lad's love," and "London pride"; then, over the white gate, and between the laburnum bush and a now faded lilac, came a peep of the road, where every now and then some of her friends passed by. These generally walked in pairs, and not infrequently "arm-in-crook," for Sunday afternoon is "cwortin'-time," as all the world knows; and when the lane had wound past the church and climbed for a little way amid great arable fields, the famous spot was reached, familiarly known as "Cwortin' Corner".

Two gates faced each other at Cwortin' Corner, and it was the custom of the young pairs who wandered

thither to lean over each in turn, gazing over the landscape with a somewhat vacant, but entirely contented, smile. A little wood gave pleasant shelter on the right, whilst on the left a glorious view was to be obtained of undulating fields and distant hills, and the red and blue walls and roofs of the new houses which were gathering on the outskirts of the little country town.

Louie knew those gates well ; many a time had she, too, halted there when she had set forth on her weekly amorous pilgrimage in company with Edward Andrews. As she sat now, in the close room, she thought of how this very spring she and Edward had stood together in the shade of the wood, if shade that could be called where as yet the delicate tracery of twigs bore only the bloom of yet unopened leaf-buds. The breeze, indeed, that came whistling through the interlacing boughs was sharp enough, and made Louie's ribbons flutter, and loosened her hair ; and Edward and she watched how the young corn in the field below was broken into ripples by it as though it were water, and was now all silver, and again green gold. There were primroses on the banks, and violets, and they played at lords and ladies as they wandered home. Yes, and as they came down the hill Edward pointed out one of those distant new cottages, and asked her how she would like to live there when she was married ; and Louie's breast swelled with pride when she thought how fine it would be to live in a house with a slate roof, to have a knocker on the front door, and to draw water from a tap instead of winding up a bucket from the well.

Well, it was all over now. She could scarcely tell what had come between them. There had been a quarrel such as had occurred often before, and this time she had discovered to her astonishment that there was to be no making up. Edward was cold, petulant, unyielding, finally informing Louie in no measured terms that he was about tired of it.

"About tired of me, I suppose you mean!" suggested Louie, with flashing eyes.

"Well, if you put it that way," returned he.

And so they parted; and that was why poor Louie stayed at home, forlorn and dismal, on this lovely afternoon, with a heart that would ache in spite of her pride, and eyes that would rove to the window and grow dim every now and then when loving couples strolled by.

Mr. and Mrs. Ford sat by the fire opposite each other, Mr. Ford practically helpless on account of his rheumatism, his wife rheumatic too, though not to such an acute degree, and, moreover, troubled with asthma. It was because of their ill-health that Louie's marriage had been so long delayed, for she was their only surviving child, and her earnings could not well be spared.

"Ye did ought to go out, Louie, my dear," said her mother all at once, after exchanging dismal glances with the old man. "There, such a lovely day as it be!"

"No thank you, mother," replied Louie, picking up her book, which had slid from her lap to the floor. "I'm readin' a nice tale."

"But the fresh air do always do 'ee so much good," urged Mrs. Ford. "I'm sure you work hard enough

during the week ; you do want a breath o' fresh air o' Sundays."

"I d' 'low she do," agreed the father. "She do do a terr'ble lot o' work—Louie do!"

"I don't care to go out," said the girl quickly.

"Ah-h-h!" sighed Mrs. Ford, "'tis cruel hard ; I'm not sayin' it bain't, Louie, my dear, but I do think ye did ought to pop out, if 'twas but for half an hour. You'll be pinin'—that's what you'll be a-doin'. And 'tis so close in this room."

"Close! Nay, mother, I can't say 'tis close," put in old John Ford in alarm, for such remarks had once or twice been known to lead to the opening of a window, a thing which he regarded with equal dislike and dread. "It's not so very warm to-day, I don't think ; but a bit of a walk 'ud do the maid good—I don't deny that."

"I don't want to go out a-walkin' by myself," cried Louie, and a big tear suddenly dropped on the open page before her.

Mrs. Ford got up and went to her, laying her hand lovingly on her shoulder. "Couldn't 'ee just sit out in the garden, my dear ?" she whispered. "It be terr'ble hot in here, whatever father mid say ; but there, ye know he can't abide a draught. Jist slip out at back—do 'ee now, love, for a mouthful of fresh air. Do, when mother axes ye."

Louie closed her book and rose unwillingly. The narrow door behind her father's chair opened and shut, and she was gone.

Having sheltered herself behind the two apple-trees, whose gnarled and lichenized boughs were veiled with

exquisite green, she looked dismally around her ; all was sunny, peaceful, happy, as it seemed to her—every one, everything, was happy except herself. She could see the meadow stretching upwards, golden and silver with buttercups and cow-parsley ; a row of pollard lime-trees stood midway in the expanse, their delicate leafage scarce as yet unfolded, and swaying and fluttering in an imperceptible breeze ; in one of the topmost boughs of a neighbouring beech a blackbird was whistling—the blackbird that sang there every spring. Last year Edward and Louie had stood listening to him on many an evening : that was before Edward had spoken, and Louie's heart had been as tremulous as the lime-trees yonder. Under the eaves of the little tarpaulin-roofed woodshed was a house-martin's nest ; Edward and Louie had watched the foundations being laid—was it days or years ago ? The nest was completed now, and the bird sitting ; but Louie and her lover would not stand side by side to watch the departure of the young brood. Somehow the sight of that swallow's nest was more than the girl could bear. It was a semi-detached house, as Edward had said, being built at right angles with another nest ; he had likened it to the cottage which he hoped to occupy some day with her, and they had joked about it, and been very happy. And now Louie was alone in the garden, and Edward was probably making his way to Cwortin' Corner in company with somebody else.

Presently Mr. and Mrs. Ford, who were dozing on either side of the hearth, were aroused by the bursting open of the outer door, and the whirlwind-like passage

of Louie through the room and up the narrow stairs to her own little chamber above. "There, now, she's back again!" exclaimed her mother, vexed.

After a moment's pause she rose, and went to the foot of the stairs. "What brings ye in so soon, Louie, love?"

"Oh, mother, I can't bear it! The birds singin', and the sun shinin', an'—an' everything."

"Leave the maid alone," growled the father.

"Nay, I'll not leave her alone, Ford. She'll go a-frettin' and a-mopin' till she makes herself right-down ill."

Limping across the kitchen, Mrs. Ford jerked out one of the drawers of the old-fashioned bureau in the corner, and drew forth her bonnet and shawl, with which she proceeded to invest herself.

"Lard, mother, you bain't a-goin' out?" queried her husband, much astonished; "it bain't church-time, not near, and ye did go last Sunday, what's more," he added, in an aggrieved tone. "You'll be laid up, you will; your rheumatics that bad an' all."

Mrs. Ford, without noticing him, straightened her bonnet at the glass, smoothed her hair, and went creaking up the stairs to her daughter's room. The girl had thrown herself across her bed, and was, as she expected, weeping; nevertheless, she greeted her with a great affectation of cheerfulness. "Louie, my dear, I don't know what you be a-feelin', but I'm jist faintin' for a breath o' air. There, my head do feel all of a higgledy-like!"

Louie sat up, dashing the tears from her eyes; her mother's face did indeed look red and strange.

"If ye'll jist come out a bit wi' me, my dear, I'd take it very kind. My limbs, d'ye see—I can never count upon my limbs, and I'd like to have ye wi' me, but I d' low a bit of a walk 'ud do I good."

"Well, I'll come," said the girl, after a pause.

"That's it; get on your hat, do. Not that shabby wold un. The pretty new straw what I did buy ye at Easter."

"Oh, mother, what do I want to make myself fine for?"

"Why, jist to make folks see as ye haven't got nothin' to be ashamed on, and to show as you be so vitty a maid as ever."

Louie donned her hat in silence, and her mother, announcing her intention of waiting in the garden while she put on her boots, went heavily downstairs again. When Louie appeared, having bathed her eyes in cold water, and adjusted her dress with great care, for Mrs. Ford's words had awakened her pride, she found that good woman, with a face wreathed in smiles, waiting for her by the gate, and holding a posy of China roses and love-in-a-mist. "There, my dear," she exclaimed, "there's pink for your cheeks and blue for your eyes. You'm goin' a-cwortin' wi' mother to-day. You come along. We'll show 'em all as you be the vittiest maid in the parish, whatever they mid say."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Louie, the tears rushing to her eyes again, but from a different motive than that which had prompted those bitter ones of a little time ago, "be that what you be a-comin' out for, an' you so bad wi' your limbs an' all?"

"Never you mind my limbs," returned Mrs. Ford heroically. "You and me be a-goin' to walk out; you and me be a-goin' for to show ourselves. I d' 'low there bain't n'ar a one o' th' idle chaps about as be half so proud of his sweetheart as what I be o' my maid."

"No, mother, I'll not have ye tirin' yourself to death. I—I'll—go by myself if you're so set on it."

"Nay, you'll do nothing of the kind. It 'ud be poor fun for 'ee to go mopin' along by yourself. Gie us your arm, love. I'm a bit short i' th' wind, an' a bit scraggled i' th' legs, but I d' 'low the air 'ull do I a terr'ble deal o' good."

So off they set, mother and daughter walking arm-in-crook in very lovers' fashion, the intrepid old woman talking all the time in the endeavour to engage Louie's attention, and to prevent her thoughts straying to other times.

"Look-see," said Louie, almost in a whisper when they had reached the high road, "if it's all the same to ye, and ye didn't find it too steep, I'd like to go on up the lane here."

"Up so far as Cwortin' Corner?" inquired Mrs. Ford. "Well, I haven't got no objections."

They pursued their way, the elder woman talking more eagerly than before, though in gasps, for the strain of the ascent was beginning to tell upon her, the younger looking absently about her. They passed many couples wending in the same direction as themselves or retracing their steps, and Mrs. Ford greeted them all with the pleasantest smile imaginable. When the first of the white gates came in sight Louie started

and drew back, for a solitary man's figure was leaning across it. "It bain't him," said Mrs. Ford aloud, answering her thought.

Louie reddened and pressed on, insensibly quickening her steps so that her mother could hardly keep pace with her. When they reached the top, indeed, she was obliged to call a halt. "There, I be fair out o' breath!" she gasped apologetically.

"Dear, I be pure sorry!" exclaimed Louie, much distressed. "Come over here by the gate and rest a bit. I'll loosen your shawl, see, and untie your bonnet-strings; you'll be better in a minute."

Supporting her mother, she piloted her across the road to the gate opposite that on which the man was leaning, and proceeded with remorseful tenderness to perform the promised good offices. She was so much taken up with her anxiety as almost to forget that her efforts were witnessed by a third party; witnessed I say, for, though the man over the way had not seemed to notice their approach, he turned round presently and stared at them, not rudely, but with interest. He was a middle-aged man with a sunburnt face and a brown beard, and the eyes which wandered from mother to daughter were at once keen and good-humoured.

"It's my breath, d'ye see, Louie love," explained Mrs. Ford, as she leaned back against the gatepost. "There, it do seem a strange thing, as I do often say to father—I can get it in right enough, but I don't seem rightly able to get it out again."

"I didn't ought to ha' hurried ye so," said Louie, full of self-reproach.

"Not a bit, dear, not a bit! Ye mid loosen thik here collar a little if ye can, though."

Poor Mrs. Ford did indeed present a pitiable appearance; her face was deeply flushed, and her eyes seemed ready to start from her head; as for that troublesome breath of hers, it seemed for the moment as difficult for her to draw it in as to expel it.

"I've been the death of you, I know I have!" groaned the girl, as Mrs. Ford in a paroxysm of coughing rolled a desperate eye on her.

"Take my advice, miss, and don't talk to the 'ooman at all, jist for a little bit," said a voice at her elbow, so suddenly that Louie turned round with a start. Their opposite neighbour had come across the path, and was now standing looking down at them with a benevolent smile.

"Don't you be thinkin' so much about gettin' your breath, mum, and it'll come all the quicker," he pursued. "'Tis so much because you're frightened-like as anything that makes you go so smothery. What a beautiful view there is from this p'int to be sure. Branston's getting to be a fine place."

Louie quickly dropped her eyes; she had not the heart to look out Branston way; but Mrs. Ford, whose expression had become a shade less strained, suffered her gaze to wander over the distant roofs.

"Dear, yes," pursued the stranger placidly; "I can see my place from here, too."

Louie looked up inquiringly, and Mrs. Ford, whose complexion was now assuming its normal hue, opened her lips as though to speak.

"Not jist yet, mum," said the man, "not for a minute till ye be more easy. D'ye see that wold stone house to the left o' the town with the trees behind and the ricks to one side? That's where I do live."

"Upperton Farm, bain't it?" ejaculated Mrs. Ford, unable any longer to keep silence.

"That's right," returned he, heartily. "I did tell ye ye'd be yourself again so soon as ye did forget about it. Lard, my poor wold father was troubled enough wi' his breathin'."

"Was Farmer Kerley o' Upperton your father?" pursued Mrs. Ford, in a series of respectful gasps.

"No, no, the wold chap was no relation at all to me. I've a-been a dairyman out Darchester side till now—made a bit o' money that way, and heard this 'ere farm was to be had, so I come to have a look at it. I liked it well enough when I see'd it, and now I be settled there."

"Ah," said Mrs. Ford. "Well, I'm sure 'tis very nice for 'ee, sir, an' it 'ull be a nice change after the dairy-work, an' I hope ye'll be very lucky. I s'pose your family 'ull be jinin' ye there?"

"I haven't got no family," said the man.

"Well, now, an' that's a pity."

"I never thought so till to-day," answered he. "Shall I tell ye what made me think so to-day?" he added, his eyes twinkling in an odd way as they fell on Louie.

"If you please, sir," said the mother, for the daughter remained silent.

"Well, mum—well, Mrs.—mid I make so bold as to ax your name?"

"I'm Mrs. Ford, if you please, sir, and this is my daughter Louie—Louisa I should say," returned the mother, with great stress on the second syllable.

"Ford? A good name, too, and short like my own. My name is Short, you know—Robert Short. Ha, ha!" Here he threw back his head to indulge a loud guffaw at his own joke, and resumed more gravely: "I never got married because—first—I hadn't got no money, and then—next—I hadn't got no time. That was to begin wi'; then, as years did go by, and I did have both time and money, well, then I didn't seem to have no inclinations."

"Strange," commented Mrs. Ford, with a doubtful smile.

"Not a bit strange, mum, if you'll excuse me, because, ye see, I got out o' the way o' thinkin' o' sich things. Well, when I was comin' out to-day I says to myself, 'It's a good thing,' I says, 'as there's nobody to mind whether I'm home late or whether I bain't,' and that set me thinkin', d'ye see; and as I come along the road and see'd first one lovin' pair and then another lovin' pair I says to myself then——"

"Ah-h-h, dear," put in Mrs. Ford, shaking her head with a groan of sympathy, "ye'd be like to feel your lonesome state, ye would indeed."

"Not a bit of it," retorted Robert; "what I did think to myself when I did see all these silly chaps and maids was that I was glad I did never ha' nothin' to do wi' sich foolishness. There, when I came to that gate and stood still a bit to rest in the shade and smoke a pipe, the folks did keep comin' an' goin'. Lard, sich goin's on and sich nonsense!"

Louie, mindful of certain achievements of her own in the past, turned away her head with a sudden vivid blush.

Robert continued, ostensibly addressing Mrs. Ford, but keeping his eyes fixed on the smooth coils of Louie's brown hair and on the rim of her averted cheek. "Thinks I to myself, 'Well, here be I, farty-five year of age, a-livin' all alone in a girt big house what wants a woman in it. But I'll never put one there,' says I, 'not as a missus, if it's needful to begin wi' sich carryin's on as these 'ere.' I kept a-lookin' and a-lookin' at the silly wenches dressed out in their fal-lals, wi' their kid gloves an' all, an' I kept a-listenin' to the stuff they was a-talkin', and I kept a-sayin' to myself: 'A pretty missus *you'll* make to a hard-workin' man. A fine way *you'll* keep his house in arder.'"

"Well, some o' these maids be good-for-nothin' hussies, I'll not deny it," agreed Mrs. Ford; "but there's others, Mr. Shart, I do assure 'ee——"

"I know that, mum," he interrupted. "I see'd that for myself. When I were a-standin' here, and see'd you and your darter come a-walkin' out up the road together, and see'd how nice she was a-helpin' on ye along, and how kind she did speak, an' how anxious she did seem to feel, I says to myself——"

"Dear to be sure, Mr. Shart," interposed Mrs. Ford, with a nervous cackle. "You don't seem to let grass grow under your feet, you don't!"

"I did say to myself," he pursued, still keeping his eyes resolutely fixed on Louie's coils of hair, "'I don't know, Robert, my boy,' says I, 'as you be so clever as you do think'."

He looked expectantly at the back of Louie's head, but it still remained averted.

Mrs. Ford was, however, equal to the occasion.

"It bain't never too late to mend, be it, Mr. Shart?" she inquired pleasantly.

Robert responded by a good-natured smile, and after a pause addressed Louie in a determined manner: "I wer' a-thinkin', my maid—I beg pardon, I should say miss—as how you and your mother mid very likely fancy a bit of a outin' one o' these days."

"Oh, I'm not one what cares for outings," Louie was beginning, when the irrepressible Mrs. Ford cut her short.

"Us do thank ye very kindly, Mr. Shart. Us be very thankful to 'ee for being so good-natured. It'll do us a terr'ble deal o' good, both on us."

"There, I wer' a-thinkin', next market-day, ye know," resumed Short, "I'll be comin' in to town, and when I've a-done my business I mid very well drive on to your place and take 'ee both home-along wi' me."

"That 'ud do very nice," agreed Mrs. Ford.

"An' then ye can be havin' a look round," announced Robert, in an explanatory tone, to Louie.

"So she can," returned Mrs. Ford jubilantly.

"Well, that's settled then. If you'll show me your place, ma'am, I'll come for 'ee same as I said."

Down the hill they went again, Mrs. Ford clinging to her daughter's arm, and giving it a warning squeeze whenever the girl attempted to discourage the project. They parted at the cottage gate, and Louie dashed indoors, almost overturning her father, who had risen from

his chair and was slowly crossing the room to meet them. "What's amiss now?" he inquired as his wife entered. "Did ye meet that chap o' hers?"

"No," returned she triumphantly, "but we did meet somebody else. There, don't ye ax no questions, nor take no notice of her tantrums. I shouldn't wonder—But least said's soonest mended."

Louie expostulated with her mother many times during the next few days. What was the good of it? she wanted to know. She wasn't the sort of maid who could take up with the first man she met—because—because—oh, well, it didn't matter, but she wasn't that sort of maid, and she didn't want to see Mr. Short's house, and she didn't care about driving, and anyway he was old enough to be her father. To all of these remarks Mrs. Ford returned pleasantly evasive answers, laying great stress on the pleasure which she herself expected to reap from the expedition, and informing Louie that she was looking forward to it just about.

In spite of her vexation, Louie performed a very careful toilet on the afternoon in question, and could not repress a feeling of exhilaration when she found herself seated in Mr. Short's gig between him and her mother. The drive was a pleasant one, and on arriving at Upperton Farm they found that their host had provided for their entertainment on a generous, not to say lavish, scale. The house itself was larger than Louie had supposed, well-kept, comfortably furnished; she was more impressed than she would have cared to own. Mrs. Ford went from room to room, looking about her with an appraising eye, but approving of all she saw.

Her face positively beamed when, after inspecting garden and orchard, barns and outhouses, all of which bore testimony to the comfortable estate of their owner, Louie and she stood on the doorstep awaiting their return journey.

"Tell 'ee what, my dear," she whispered in Louie's ear, as Robert left them in order to "hitch" the horse, "ye'd be doin' pretty well for yourself if ye was to take him."

"There hasn't been nothin' said yet, mother; besides—"

"I don't want to hear nothin' about besideses. All I says is ye'd be doin' pretty well for yourself. Look at them ricks over yonder—that means summat; and look at—"

The appearance of Robert and the trap at this juncture prevented further conversation, but, as they drove along, and Robert pointed out certain outlying portions of his property with his whip, Mrs. Ford emphasised each remark with a vehement dig of her elbow. Nothing was said, however, about a future meeting, and when Sunday came without a sign from Farmer Short, the matchmaker began to feel a little uneasy.

"Louie," she observed to the girl, who was sitting in her accustomed place, feeling restless, too, and unaccountably vexed; "Louie, I could like very well to take a little walk with 'ee, my dear."

"Mother," returned Louie, flashing round upon her, "I bain't a-goin' to look for Mr. Short, if that's what you do mean. I bain't a-goin' to be runnin' after a man because another's thrown me off. I don't want

to ha' nothin' to do with men—never no more," she added emphatically.

Mrs. Ford kept silence for a little, and Louie, turning her back to the window, and supporting her chin on her hand, fixed her eyes resolutely on her book. Steps were heard in the lane without, but she would not turn her head; the gate creaked on its hinges, and the steps sounded on the flagged path.

"No need for 'ee to go a-lookin' for Mr. Shart," whispered her mother hurriedly and triumphantly, "for here he be come a-lookin' for 'ee."

Robert himself announced the fact a minute or two later with a puzzled, not to say offended, air. "I've a-been walkin' up the lane yonder—I thought you and your mother did always walk out o' Sundays, an' when I got so far as the gates and couldn't find 'ee I came to fetch 'ee."

"I'm not so very well to-day," replied the shameless Mrs. Ford, "but I d' low the maid 'ull be glad to get a breath o' fresh air."

"Mother, I bain't a-goin' wi'out you," exclaimed Louie, with flaming cheeks.

"There, now, my dear, I wouldn't press her to come if I was you," said Robert, eyeing his would-be mother-in-law with a dispassionate air; "she don't look so very well, and yon lane be terr'ble steep. But you do look a bit pined yourself for want o' fresh air, if I mid say so, so pop on your hat and let's be steppin'."

She hesitated, but he seemed so good-natured and unsuspicious of offence, and his tone was so persuasive, that after a moment's pause she yielded.

"Shan't us walk arm-in-crook?" he inquired, when they reached the corner of the lane.

"No need for that," said Louie, growing very pink.

Robert considered. "The other folks do all seem to be a-doin' of it," he observed, and, without waiting for further permission, hooked himself on to her in the prescribed fashion. They passed three or four couples who gazed at them with great curiosity. Louie dropped her eyes; perhaps she was not sorry to let people see that she was not grieving for Edward's desertion.

"What be they a-sayin' to each other, do 'ee think?" asked Robert, after a pause; his brown face wore a puzzled, not to say anxious, expression.

Louie laughed a little. "You ought to know, Mr. Short. Didn't you say last week as ye'd been a-listenin' to a lot o' sich talk?"

Robert's look became still more dismayed.

"Well, I thought at the time they was talkin' rubbish," he said, "but I bain't so sure now. I d' low it be nat'ral enough. You an' me ought to be a-sayin' summat to each other," he added, with sudden eagerness.

Louie stopped short. They had rounded the corner of the lane, and the path before them was deserted. "There's summat I mid say to 'ee, Mr. Short, and summat I did ought to say, but I'm afeard ye'll not be so very well pleased to hear it."

"Oh," said Robert, stroking his chin and eyeing her nervously.

"'E-es," pursued Louie, snatching her arm away from him, and beginning to walk on very fast. "I

did use to come here often before, nigh upon every Sunday, but 'twasn't wi' mother I come."

"Oh, and wasn't it?" responded Short, as she paused.

Two of his strides had brought him alongside of her again, and with quiet determination he regained possession of her arm.

"'Twas wi' a young man," announced Louie.

"Ah," commented Robert. "A young man? Much younger nor me?"

"Oh, a lot!"

"Ye had it made up between ye to get married, I s'pose?" he queried gloomily, after a pause.

"'E-es, but I couldn't leave father and mother. They're both gettin' old, d'ye see—I be the youngest of all our family—they be all dead 'cept me. I do do for 'em, and I do help to keep 'em, and Edward said he didn't mind waitin', but he got tired in the end."

A little sob came with the last words.

"Was he in such a hurry as all that to get married?" asked Robert, with an immovable face.

"Oh, I don't know. He—he—took a fancy to somebody else very like."

"That's bad," remarked Robert. "I han't got no opinion at all o' folks as don't know their own mind."

Silence fell between them, and they walked on towards Cwortin' Corner, linked, indeed, in lover-like fashion, but neither venturing to glance at the other.

When Louie raised her eyes at last she started and exclaimed. The goal was at length in sight, and leaning over the gate on the left-hand side she descried a well-known figure—two well-known figures, alas! For

Edward Andrews was in close conversation with Sally Paynter, a Branston shopgirl, whom Louie had often encountered on her way to and from work. Insensibly she clutched Robert's arm.

"Oh, Mr. Short, I must go back. I—I—oh, that's him yonder, and I see—he has—he has—"

The state of affairs was patent to even Robert's somewhat slow comprehension.

"Oh, that's him, is it? Well, don't ye be for runnin' away, my maid. You come straight on wi' I, and let 'em see as ye bain't a-breakin' your heart for en."

Thus adjured, Louie rallied her self-possession, and stepped along bravely by his side; and the two took up their position in a shady corner by the opposite gate. Edward, after an amazed glance at the pair, and a moment's extreme discomfiture, made valiant endeavours on his side to carry off the situation.

"One o' they little semi-detached houses, see," he remarked in a loud voice to Sally. "Ye'd like it, wouldn't ye?"

"Jist about," said Sally.

Blue fire shot from Louie's eyes.

"Say summat, Mr. Short," she whispered fiercely. "Say summat quick."

"But whatever must I say?" inquired he, taken aback.

"Oh, whatever ye like—nonsense-talk—the sort o'—o' foolishness as cwortin' folk do carry on wi'."

"There, now," groaned Robert. "Blest if I han't forgot—"

"A tap, ye know," Edward explained to Sally.

"'Tis much more handy nor drawin' up water from a well ; and there's a knocker on the door."

The fire in Louie's eyes was quenched by angry tears.

"Ye don't seem to have the spirit of a mouse, Mr. Short," she exclaimed, clenching her hands.

Robert turned very red, and after a pause so brief as to be scarcely perceptible, suddenly thrust out one of his arms and caught Louie round the waist. She was so much astonished that she stood quite still ; nevertheless she stole a glance at Edward, realising with a thrill of satisfaction that he, too, had flushed, and that he looked angry.

"You and me 'ull be fallin' over pulpit soon, Sally," he cried, in a loud voice.

Louie looked up quickly at Robert ; there was a good deal of unconscious appeal mingled with the indignation of her glance. The farmer still held her as though in a vice, his lips compressed, his eyes determined.

"I could wish this wasn't Sunday," he observed.

"Why ?" inquired Louie, with an attempt to appear quite composed.

"Because banns, d'ye see," he returned, "banns can't be put up afore a week. 'Tis a long time to wait, and then us 'ull ha' to be give out three times—that's three Sundays—that's a dalled long time."

Louie, still endeavouring to seem quite at her ease, murmured somewhat inarticulately that he must have patience.

"There's one thing, Sally, my maid," cried Edward, in a jovial tone ; "you and me needn't wait for nobody.

There, 'tis a great comfort, I'm sure, to think as ye haven't got no father nor mother to interfere; us can get tied up to-morrow if we've a mind to."

The girl over the way flinched at this home-thrust, and her lip quivered, whereupon Robert spoke hastily:—

"I've been a-thinkin'," he said; "there's yon big place o' mine—it mid seem a bit lonesome for ye while I'm out and about the fields. There be room for the wold folks if you could persuade 'em to shift—room and to spare. Ye'd best see about that, my dear. We'll carry 'em off, look-see, and set 'em down in chimney-corner so snug as anythin'. Ye'd like to have 'em there, wouldn't ye, my maid?"

Louie's face lit up with an expression of genuine gratitude. Whether the words were spoken in earnest or not, they turned the tables on Edward in a most satisfactory way.

"You are a good man, Mr. Short!" she exclaimed. "There, ye be the kindest man I ever heerd on. I didn't think anybody could be so good-natured."

"Shall us be walkin' on a bit?" said Edward to Sally, with what was meant to be a devil-may-care air. "Let's go where we can get by ourselves."

They strolled away, and Louie and Robert watched them in silence till the last flutter of Sally's ribbons was lost behind the green hedge; then Louie endeavoured to disengage herself.

"I think ye mid let me go now, Mr. Short," she observed. "They'll not be comin' back. Ye spoke up very well at the last."

Robert took no notice of the first part of her speech, but showed becoming elation over the latter part.

"I was allus a bit slow," he returned. "It do take I some time to get my thoughts together, but once they be there, I do stick to 'em."

There was a pause; Louie, much embarrassed, made another feeble attempt to disengage herself.

"'Tis a good notion, that," resumed the farmer, still apparently oblivious of her purpose; "'tis a good notion that about the wold folks. I reckon they'll like the change."

"But you wasn't in earnest, was ye?" faltered the girl. "Ye did only carry on that way jist to put Edward in his place."

"I'm not the sort of man what says things he don't mean to stand by," returned Short indignantly. "I'm one what knows his own mind, as I did tell ye before. Ye'll be a-sayin' next as I didn't mean we was to be called home on Sunday, I d' 'low."

"Well, but," said Louie, "I'm not sure—Mr. Short."

"Ah, but I be," he responded, with a kind of complacent determination. "I do know what I be about. That chap yonder didn't know what he was about, and no more did you when you did take up wi' he. Now I do—look-see. So there, jist make up your mind straight off, and stick to it, maidie. I'll be a good husband, and ye'll never ha' no need to repent."

Louie looked up into the brown face; it was open and honest; the eyes looking back at her were very good-humoured and kind.

"I don't know what to say, I'm sure," she murmured, hesitatingly.

"No need to say nothin' at all, my dear," cried Robert jubilantly, "'tis all settled."

Thereupon he stooped and kissed her, and, raising his head with great pride, remarked that he was gettin' on with the cwortin' nicely.

THE WOODPECKER.

"EH, dear," groaned John Barnes to himself, as he threaded his way through the greasy Liverpool streets, "I wouldn't live in town, no, not for a thousand pound a year! A body can scarce breathe, and the smudge and the dirt and the smells and all—and the folks wi' their foul clothes and their faces all mucked over!"

Words failed him at this juncture, and he summed up the remainder of his strictures in a tremendous shake of the head.

"Well, come, here's the office at last. It beats me how Mr. Smart can choose for to live in such a place—to pass so much of his time there, anyway. 'Tis a wonder they lawyer folks can't do their business in the country; and Mr. Smart that rich, and never a chick nor child to leave his brass to. I'd have a nice little place, *I* know, wi' a two-three cows and that, and a few pigs and some fowls; but town, town, town, all day and all night—if Mr. Smart weren't a lawyer I could think him a bit of a fool!"

He was halfway up the second flight of stairs by this time, the broad, grimy stone stairs that led to the lawyer's office, stairs that had been polished by the feet of generations of clerks and clients. Others besides Mr. Smart had chambers in the great murky building;

an auctioneer, an estate valuer, an insurance agent, were among a few of the busy men who tenanted these premises.

John Barnes shook his head again when he paused at length outside the door on which Mr. Smart's name was duly set forth.

Before ringing the bell he dusted his coat carefully, pulled up his collar, and removed his hat. He felt unaccountably nervous, though he had come to execute, and not to receive, justice. He intended, in fact, to speak out his mind pretty plainly to Mr. Smart concerning a pigsty, long promised by the proprietor of the estate of which the lawyer was agent, but not yet erected. A promise was a promise, and a pigsty was a pigsty; but that there tumbledown cot at home was not fit to shelter any self-respecting porker. John reckoned Mr. Smart wouldn't have much to say for himself; nevertheless, what with the streets and what with the stairs, he felt unaccountably confused.

At last, however, he made up his mind to sound the bell, and after passing through the outer office, and being well stared at by the various clerks, he found himself in Mr. Smart's private room.

"The boss will be in soon," remarked the pert youth who conducted him; "he's just stepped out for lunch."

"Right!" said John, depositing his hat on the nearest chair and falling into an easy attitude with his hands behind him.

"Sit down if you like," said the office boy condescendingly, as he surveyed the burly countryman.

"Nay, I'll stand, thank ye," said John; and then he

pursed up his lips as though prepared to whistle, and suffered his eyes to roam round the ceiling in a manner intended to convey the impression that he was entirely happy and at his ease.

The boy withdrew, and John immediately brought down his eyes to the walls, which were covered with plans and maps, to the writing-table with its neat piles of docketed papers, to the noble array of safes and tin boxes, and to the rest of the paraphernalia natural in such a place.

"T-h-o-r-n-Thornleigh estate," he spelt out, staring at one of the white-lettered cases nearest to him. "I shouldn't wonder if there were summat about my pigsty in yon. Squire, he gave his word, and Mr. Smart, he wrote it down, and naught's been done."

The memory of his injuries restored his self-possession; he drew his brows together and looked about him more fiercely, and all at once a curious little sound fell upon his ear.

*Tap—tap—tap. . . . Tap—tap. . . . Tap—tap—tap—
—tap.*

"Whatever can that be?" thought John.

There was a partly opened door to his right, immediately behind the high-backed chair presumably usually occupied by the lawyer, but fenced off by a screen, so that no one could see whither it led. The sound seemed to proceed from this direction.

*Tap—tap—tap—tap. . . . Tap—tap. . . . Tap—tap—
—tap.*

It was a curious, sharp, clicking noise, accompanied every now and then by the single note of a little bell.

John was still lost in wonderment when the lawyer entered—a burly, grizzled little man, with a good-humoured face and a kindly eye.

“Ha, John Barnes! Morning, John. It’s the pigsty, I suppose?”

“Yes, Mr. Smart, it is the pigsty. I can’t wait no longer for it, and the sow she can’t wait, poor beast, and Squire, he said——”

“Yes, I know, I know; we’ve been so busy, you see, John; but I haven’t forgotten you; I meant to look you up on Monday, when I am coming out your way.”

“Well, I reckoned I’d look *you* up, Mr. Smart. I had to come to town about some seed potatoes, and I says to myself, says I, ‘I’ll go and see if Mr. Smart’s alive. He can scarce be alive,’ I says, ‘else he’d ha’ given me a thought afore now.’ I’m glad to find you’re still in this world, Mr. Smart.”

It was a somewhat ponderous joke, but John perpetrated it with a vast amount of ecstatic chuckling, and Mr. Smart laughed too.

“Well, it’s all right. I needn’t go up to your place myself on Monday, but I’ll send the masons—will that do?”

“Ah, that’ll do,” replied John, nodding; “‘twill do very well, that will. I’ll expect them, Mr. Smart.”

He was turning to leave the room when the tapping, which had ceased during the interview, began again with renewed vigour; he wheeled round, his honest, sunburnt face astir with curiosity.

“Mr. Smart, if I might make so bold as to ax,

whatever is that tappin' sound yon? I've been listenin' to it twenty minutes and more. *Tap—tap—tap—tap*, and then *ding*, and then *tap—tap—tap—tap* again."

"Why, that's a typewriter, John," responded the lawyer. "Have you never heard of a typewriter?"

"What make o' writer might that be?" inquired the countryman, looking much mystified.

"I'll show you if you like. May we come in for a moment, Jessie? Mr. Barnes has never seen a machine like yours."

"Come in, sir, certainly," said a voice—a very sweet woman's voice—and the tapping immediately ceased.

The young farmer, with a somewhat awestruck expression, followed Mr. Smart, round the screen and through the doorway, into a room so small that nearly all the available space was occupied by a table and chair. Set forth upon this table was an odd-looking object, the like of which John had never before beheld; and seated in the chair was a little woman—or rather girl—with a pretty pale face and eyes that were both bright and soft. What most forcibly struck the beholder, however, was her hair, which was very abundant, and of so warm a gold that it might positively be said to radiate sunshine; it rose up from the pale serene forehead like a ruddy nimbus.

She bowed smilingly to the old gentleman, but made no attempt to rise.

"Show Mr. Barnes how the machine works, Jessie," said Mr. Smart.

The girl's fingers flew over the keys, and John now discovered how the tapping was produced.

"It's quite easy," said the girl. "I like the work very much."

She withdrew the slip of paper from the roller and handed it to John, whose amazement knew no bounds.

"My word! my word!" he cried ecstatically. "I never see anything so clever in my life. It's wrote the very words you've been saying—the very self-same words, and that quick! If I was to go and write 'em wi' a pen it 'ud take me best part of a half-hour. Ah! that it would. It's—it's more like witchcraft nor anything else. I can't for the life o' me see how it's done."

"Oh, I'll soon show you," said Jessie, laughing too. "You see, every time you press a letter the corresponding one drops into its place. I'll write your name if you like—Barnes, isn't it?"

"John Barnes," cried the proprietor of that title eagerly; he bent down as the nimble fingers again flitted over the keys. "Why, them letters is all mixed up every way; I can't for the life o' me think how you contrive to pick 'em out."

Jessie tilted back the "carriage" and showed John his own name neatly emblazoned in the midst of a garland of flourishes.

Barnes was almost stupefied, and stood for several seconds clicking his tongue before he could find words wherein to convey his admiration. When he did at length recover speech, it was evident that he considered the performance entirely due to Jessie's own extraordinary cleverness, and in no way to the ingenious contrivance which she manipulated.

"Why, it's like print," he remarked, after exhausting

himself in eulogy of her speed and dexterity; "just the very same as print. I always thought it took a man to make print—a good few men it takes to make newspaper print, I reckon. And this here little lass just goes tap—tap—tap—tap wi' they little small fingers of hers, and out it pops as clear as any newspaper. *John Barnes!* And ornammented beautiful. I'd like to keep that there, miss, if you haven't no objections."

With a gay little laugh Jessie removed the paper, and, taking up a pair of scissors that lay beside her, folded and cut it into a neat square.

"There, that will do for a visiting-card," she said, as she handed it to him; "next time you go to call on anybody, and they are not at home, you can leave that, Mr. Barnes."

The lawyer was called away at this juncture, and went into the adjoining room, leaving John carefully stowing away his newly acquired treasure in his pocket-book.

"Nay, I'll not leave it nowheres," said John, as he restored this receptacle to his pocket. "I'll keep it—ah! sure I will. I'll keep it, and maybe have it framed. I never see such a thing."

He paused, gazing at her with a smile that was half sheepish, half humorous.

"I'm thinkin' of summat," he remarked. "I'm thinkin' you're like summat, but maybe you'd be vexed if I was to tell ye."

The little creature flushed up and stiffened for a moment, but presently relaxed, the kindness of John's face disarming her.

"What is it?" she said.

"Why, you see," said Barnes, growing very red, but still smiling broadly, "there's the tappin', ye know—*tap, tap, tap*—and there's the bright eyes—meanin' no offence, miss—and there's the little head turnin' this way and that; and there's the——" Here he paused, hesitated, and finally, with a shout of laughter, brought out the words—"there's the crest!" He pointed significantly to the girl's hair. "When I heard ye and when I see'd ye I couldn't for the life o' me help thinking it. You're like a woodpecker miss."

Jessie had grown very pink again, and looked at him, uncertain whether to be amused or offended.

"And what is a woodpecker?" said she.

"Eh, dear, to think on't! Haven't ye never heard tell of a woodpecker? It's a bird—a little bird as runs up and down the trees peckin' at the bark. Don't ye know *The woodpecker tappin'*?"

"Yes, to be sure," returned she, confusedly. "I forgot for a moment. But you see I know nothing about birds, except birds in cages. I have never been to the country."

"Never been to the country!" ejaculated Barnes. "And ye don't know nothin' about birds! Why, ye look just same as a bird yourself—and so quick and that! I reckon you could fly like one."

Jessie shook her head rather mournfully.

"No, indeed, Mr. Barnes, I could not fly—I cannot even walk."

John's jaw dropped, and he became mute with consternation and compassion.

"I have never walked since I was quite a little child," went on Jessie more cheerfully. "But I can do a great deal with my hands, so that makes up for it. I am thankful to be able to help father a little. He is getting so old now, and a bit muddled in the head, and the office work tries him. He used to be one of Mr. Smart's clerks. It was Mr. Smart's idea that I should learn the typewriting, and he says I am very useful to him. He is so kind, you can't think. Father brings me here in the morning, and helps me upstairs before any one is about, and I sit here so quiet and snug all day, and no one bothers me. I think myself very lucky and very happy."

"Well, Barnes, have you seen all that's to be seen in there?" called out Mr. Smart from the next room.

"I reckon I ought to be going," said John unwillingly. "I'm awful pleased to ha' met ye, miss——" He paused, gazing at her with a queer, dubious expression; "it does seem a strange thing as you haven't never been to the country. Eh, I do think a breath o' country air would do ye a deal o' good—a deal o' good it would. It seems a pity as ye don't know summat about birds. And flowers, now—have ye never seen the flowers growin'?"

Jessie laughed.

"I've seen them growing in pots," she said, "and in the park sometimes, when father was stronger and able to take me out in the bath-chair."

"Town flowers!" ejaculated Barnes contemptuously. "I don't think nought o' town flowers, all smudge and smuts and that——"

"Well, Barnes?" said Mr. Smart interrogatively, appearing at the open door. "I can't have you taking up any more of Miss Foster's time; she mustn't work too late in the evening, or her father will be grumbling."

Barnes, with an awkward sideways nod, followed the lawyer out of the room, pausing, however, in the adjoining one to gaze questioningly at the old man. After a minute, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, he remarked, still with an inquiring look: "Well, I've seen summat to-day—I have that".

"You've seen a very brave girl," said Mr. Smart. "That little creature, who has nothing to depend on but her clever head and her active fingers, is practically the breadwinner. Her poor old father is fit for nothing now; of course I make out little jobs for him occasionally, but I have to be very careful. They are both as proud as Lucifer. I wanted to pension him, but he wouldn't hear of it, and neither would she; so I—well, he imagines he is of use to me still, and the daughter fully earns her salary."

"It don't seem right," said John gruffly. "That there bit of a thing didn't ought to be workin', an' she lame an' all!"

"I think she would die if she didn't work," said the other; "it is the truest kindness to put employment in her way. She has no one in the world to depend upon but herself—her poor old father is now a burden to her; yet the way these two apparently helpless folk manage to help each other is beautiful. She has the brains and the nimble fingers, and he, muddled old

creature though he is, has still got the use of his legs. You should see her going the rounds of their own little place of a morning, supported, almost carried, by the old man, and making good use of her duster ; then he sweeps, and she directs. But now, positively, my good John, you must be off ! You country folks think you can take up as much of a busy man's time as you like. Good-day. I'll see about the pigsty."

As John made his way down the dingy stone steps he thought of the two figures who painfully toiled up and down them every day ; and when he reached the street, and looked about him at the muddy pavement and tall, smoke-begrimed houses, he groaned to himself.

" Never heard a bird singin', nor see'd a flower growin' wi'out 'twere in a pot !" he ejaculated, and went on his way abstractedly.

A few weeks later Mr. Smart was astonished by receiving another visit from Mr. John Barnes. The spring was advancing now, and he could afford to take a holiday.

" Pigsty's finished," he remarked, after he had greeted the old man.

" All right. I hope you are satisfied. You've not come to ask for anything else, have you ? "

" Nay," said John. " Nay, I don't want aught else. Is Miss—— is *she* all right ? I can hear that there writin' machine tappin' away same as ever."

" It's not idle for many hours in the day," returned the old man. " Yes, she's quite well, and as cheery as ever."

John thrust his hand into the capacious pocket of his greatcoat and produced, with some difficulty, a

large brown-paper parcel, which had hitherto caused that receptacle to bulge out in a conspicuous manner.

"I've brought her a two-three flowers," he remarked, growing very red, and speaking with more than customary gruffness. "They was in my way yon, an' I reckoned she might as well have 'em."

"Why, that was a kind thought," exclaimed Mr. Smart, leaning back in his chair and gazing at the farmer with surprise and pleasure.

"Nay," returned Barnes in a surly tone, "nay, I don't hold wi' havin' flowers about—I'm fain to get shut on 'em. Will you give 'em to her?"

"You had better present them yourself. Go in, and don't stay too long."

After a doubtful glance, John strode across the room, and unceremoniously thrust open the door of the adjoining one.

"I've brought a posy for ye," he said; "laylock and daffodils, and that, and primroses—and polyanthies. I wish ye good-day."

And having deposited the contents of his parcel upon the table, looking, it must be owned, somewhat the worse for their sojourn in his pocket, he closed the door again, and left the office before the girl had time to stammer her thanks.

Her busy machine was silent for a few moments, and when the lawyer, whose curiosity had been aroused, presently peeped in, he found Jessie sitting with her face buried rapturously in her bunch of country sweets. Such a little flushed face, and so bright with joy; the old man wished that John could have seen it.

"Wasn't it good of him?" she cried; "wasn't it kind? I have never had so many flowers together in my life. But he might have let me thank him—he didn't give me time to thank him."

"You'd better send him a little note," said Mr. Smart, "a nice little typewritten note. I will give you his address. He will think it the most wonderful honour, and admire your cleverness more than ever."

And duly on the following day John received a very marvel of a little note, in which the proper names were set forth in capitals, and the paragraphs divided by lines composed of alternate colons and marks of exclamation, which produced a highly decorative effect.

In the following week business took Mr. Smart to the Thornleigh estate, and he called at Barnes's farm to inspect the new pigsty. As he was preparing to leave John suddenly stretched out a detaining hand.

"Bank Holiday next Monday," he remarked, with seeming irrelevance.

"Yes, John—Easter Monday. It doesn't make much difference to you farmers, does it? You make your men work just the same as usual, I believe."

John cleared his throat.

"I was thinkin' of taking a day off mysel' next Monday," he observed. "Yon little lass—her as does the tap-writin'—the woodpecker, you know—" Here he broke off to laugh uproariously, and then suddenly became preternaturally solemn again as Mr. Smart stared. "*She* gets a day off, doesn't she?"

"Yes, the office will be closed on Monday, of course."

"Could she sit in a trap?" inquired Barnes. "Because I were thinkin'," he went on, without waiting for the answer, "I might just as well as not call for her and the owd lad Monday mornin', and fetch 'em out to my place for the day. 'Twouldn't be so very much trouble, an' I doubt she'd like it."

"I'm sure she would," returned the lawyer, much astonished.

"She's never been in the country, ye see," went on John, speaking quickly and gruffly. "A breath o' country air would do her good. She'd like to see the flowers, an' the birds, an' that. But I wasn't sure if she could sit up all that way in the cart without hurtin' herself. I wouldn't wish for to hurt her," said John, eyeing Mr. Smart distrustfully.

"It would not hurt her at all; on the contrary, it would do her a great deal of good. The little thing is wonderfully strong in a way; her lameness does not affect her general health."

"Then I'll call for her," said Barnes decisively. "I'll call for her at nine o'clock on Monday morning, an' I'll bring her an' father back same night. Where does she live?"

Mr. Smart gave the address, and went on his way, marvelling. If Jessie were like other people he would have thought that John was courting her; but being what she was—no, no. The good fellow was sorry for her, and that was all.

Little Jessie and her father, both arrayed in their very best, and both beaming with happiness, were waiting on the doorstep of the house which contained

their humble lodging when John Barnes drove up on Easter Monday morning. He had a very big powerful horse, and "the trap" was so high that the top of Jessie's pretty hat barely reached the splash-board. Her joyous little face clouded over for a moment as she took note of this fact.

"How shall I ever get in?" she asked piteously.

Tears were starting to her eyes, her lip was quivering; should she be obliged after all to renounce this pleasure, when so very little pleasure came her way? But John speedily set her fears at rest.

"Wo, lad!" he said to the horse, and then to Jessie: "Now then, little lass!"

He leaned down, stretching out his long arms, and in a moment Jessie was whisked off her feet and comfortably installed on the high seat.

"Come along, mester," said John, stretching out a hand again, and "father," becoming wonderfully wide-awake all at once, stepped upon the wheel, and was hauled likewise into the vehicle.

"Right!" said John cheerily. "Now then, little miss in the middle, an' you an' me at each side to keep her safe and warm. I have brought a footstool for her—seat's high; that's it, under them there little feet. Now hap her round wi' the rug. Feelin' pretty comfortable, Miss Jessie?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Jessie gleefully. Her face was quite pink, her eyes shining; two little dimples peeped in and out as she smiled and looked about her.

John gathered up the reins, and they set off, the big horse hammering over the cobble-stones, the big wheels

jolting on and off the tramlines, the trap swaying violently from side to side.

The drive from Liverpool to Thornleigh is not by any means a beautiful one—the first portion of it at least; but Jessie enjoyed everything, even passing through the Liverpool slums and the very unattractive suburbs of the great busy city; and when, at last, these were left behind, and they found themselves out in the flat open country, amid green fields and budding hedges, her ecstasy knew no bounds. There were woods—real woods—in the distance, and they drove for some little time along the banks of a canal; and later on their road took them through a country town where, between the rows of neat houses, they caught glimpses of sandhills and the sea.

The air was very fresh and pure, and had an invigorating sharpness in it; it brought fresh roses to Jessie's cheeks and loosened her pretty hair.

"She's like a pictur'," thought John as he glanced at her, and then he sighed.

Now they were out in the open country once more, and driving along a straight road between cornfields, with a great band of woods stretching away in front of them, and homely roofs and stacks peeping out here and there from their midst.

This was Thornleigh.

Before reaching the village proper, however, John turned down a sandy lane, and presently came in sight of a snug farmhouse of time-worn red brick, with a large yard in front and an orchard in the rear.

"Yon's the place," said he, pointing with his whip,

and in another moment pulled up in the midst of the yard aforesaid.

A rough, good-humoured-looking fellow came forward to unharness the horse, and John, taking Jessie in his arms with no more ado than if she had been a baby, jumped with her to the ground. He carried her right into the house, through a bright kitchen, where a sunburnt old woman was busy amid pots and pans, to the parlour beyond, a cheerful room with roses, red and blue, on the wall-paper and dimity curtains. A wood fire burnt in the grate, for though April was almost over it was still chilly enough; but the latticed windows stood open, and the sweet air came in, bringing with it the scent of lilac and budding wallflowers.

Jessie drew a deep breath as he deposited her on the chintz-covered sofa.

"Eh, this is nice!" she cried. "You did well to say there was nothing like country air. Oh, look at the trees yonder; and I can see chickens, little tiny chickens in the grass, and white flowers, and yellow flowers. My word, my word!"

"I'll take ye to see 'em all presently," said John delightedly. "I'll just nip out and fetch the owd lad, and then we'll have a bit o' dinner, an' then out we'll go."

"Dinner, indeed!" ejaculated an irate voice from the doorway, and Jessie, looking round, saw the brown-faced old woman standing, hands on hips, surveying them discontentedly. "Dinner! 'Tis but just gone eleven, an' you never dug me no taters afore you went, John. A body 'ud want to have forty hands in this

house, what wi' milkin' cows, and makin' butter, an' readyin' up the place, an' cookin' dinner for strange folks."

"Couldn't I lend a hand?" said Jessie quickly. "Father would get the potatoes if you'd show him where they are, Mr. Barnes—he's wonderfully active still, father is—and I could peel them. And isn't there anything else I could do? Can I help with the pudding?"

"Pudden!" ejaculated the old lady. "Set ye up! We don't never ha' no puddens here. A j'int o' plain mate an' a few taters, an' maybe a bit o' cabbage or a two-three turnips. 'Tis all I engage for,' says I to John there, when I settled to do for him arter his mother died; says I, 'Plain victuals, an' washin' an' milkin', an' keepin' place clean—I'll not engage to do no more than that,' I says. An' I've been doin' for him nigh upon ten year now."

"I could make a pudding if you liked," said Jessie; "I'm a famous cook."

"Now then, Molly, you'll have to take a lesson," cried John in high glee; "if this here little lass is as good a hand at the cookin' as she is at the writin' we may expect a treat. Why, here's the old gentleman got himself down all right, I believe."

"Father!" cried Jessie eagerly, as she took off her hat and jacket, and patted the little stray tendrils of hair into place—"Father, we're going to be so busy! You're to help me into the kitchen first, and then you're going to dig some potatoes——"

"Nay, we'll not ax him to do that," interrupted John.

"Take off your coat, and sit you down, and rest by the fire, sir. We'll not trouble you to help the lass next door neither. I'll nip in with her myself in a minute."

"Oh, please," said Jessie, colouring up, "I'd rather have father."

John drew back, looking rather crestfallen, and in a moment, recovering her equanimity, she smiled up at him as though to disarm him.

"I'm used to father, you see," she said.

By the time John came back with the potatoes the pudding-making was in full progress. That was a pudding! There was such weighing and sifting, and whipping and kneading, as John had never seen. He stood by, deeply impressed, while she buttered the mould.

"She thinks of everything," he said to himself.

"I never see'd anything so clever—it beats all!"

When, in course of time, the pudding came to table he ate his portion with an almost reverential air.

"Couldn't be better made if you was at the cooking always!" he remarked.

The repast being concluded, he proposed an inspection of the premises out of doors.

"Ye'll not be able to walk, of course, an' we haven't a bath-chair here," he said. "I had a notion of carryin' ye—'twas but a notion, of course," he added hastily, mindful of his recent rebuff. "'Twouldn't do; 'twouldn't do at all. We must arrange some other way. I wonder now if a wheelbarrow wi' plenty of straw——"

"The very thing!" cried Jessie, laughing ecstatically. "If it would not be troubling you too much," she went on more gravely.

With an eager disclaimer Barnes hurried off to secure the vehicle in question, and Jessie donned her jacket, and, with the aid of her father, took up her position in the porch. She refused to wear a hat ; it was so nice to feel the air blowing all round her face and head, she said.

Very quaint she looked, perched presently upon a golden heap of straw in John's great barrow, with her little feet sticking out from beneath her trim skirt, and that wonderful hair of hers all ablaze in the sun. John looked tenderly down at her as he trundled her up and down the paths of the old-fashioned garden, pausing every now and then to let her sniff at a branch of lilac or pick a primrose or a polyanthus.

Round the farmyard they went next, Jessie being interested in everything, from the smallest, most engaging chicken to the largest pig ; but she liked the orchard best of all. As the wheelbarrow went bumping over the long grass she gazed about her in rapture. Daffodils grew in patches here and there, and every plum and pear-tree was a sheet of blossom ; and there were even one or two apple-trees showing little rosy cups on their gnarled twigs.

"I never saw anything so pretty in my life!" she cried, as he paused in the middle of the enclosure to let her gaze her fill.

They were alone, old Foster having lingered by the gate to light and smoke his pipe. Jessie's cheeks were as pink as the apple blossoms themselves ; the breeze was lifting the curls on her forehead, and making them dance and wave ; her little white teeth flashed out as she smiled.

"You'd see something bonnier if ye could see yourself," said John, dropping the handles of the wheelbarrow and bending over her.

The smile vanished from Jessie's lips, and the colour faded from her face.

"Oh, Mr. Barnes," she said in a low, shocked voice, "you should not say such things as that to me!"

"Why not," he retorted quickly, "if they're true?"

"I did not expect it from you," she protested vehemently; "you know I am not like other girls."

"You're a deal nicer than any lass I ever see," responded John. "I like ye a deal better——"

"Oh, hush!" cried she; "I can't bear to hear you talk like that."

"I won't if it vexes ye," said he, in an altered voice, "but I meant no offence."

He tilted the wheelbarrow again and trundled her silently between the rows of trees, and out at the other side, and past the "shippions," where Molly was hard at work milking a batch of fine cows, and back to the door again; but not a word said he.

Jessie twisted round her head and looked up at him; his face was very grave. Then she looked down at the strong hands which held the barrow-handles, and she saw that one of his coat-sleeves was frayed at the edge.

"Mr. Barnes," said she in a small, insinuating voice, "I can't help noticing that your coat wants mending. I wonder if you would let me sew it up. I've got a needle and cotton here."

"Well, that's a notion," said John, becoming good-

humoured all at once ; " I never see'd any one like ye for noticing things."

Down went the legs of the barrow again, and out came a neat little housewife from Jessie's pocket. Barnes thrust out his big brown hand, and Jessie's little white fingers went flitting round it with butterfly speed and lightness, turning in the frayed edge and stitching it down. The work was done in a few moments, and John inspected it gravely, saying to himself once more : " There's nought as she can't do ; I never see'd her equal".

" How 'ud it be if we was to have tea out here in the porch ? " he said aloud. " You'd like it, wouldn't ye ? The owd lad wouldn't catch cold neither if we happed him well in's coat. 'Tis nice and sheltered in yon corner."

Again Jessie clapped her hands with the childlike glee which John found so delightful ; and leaving her still enthroned in her wheelbarrow, he went indoors to fetch her father's coat and to desire Molly to prepare the tea.

" In porch ! " exclaimed that good woman with indignant surprise ; " well, what nonsense ! I reckon thou'rt goin' crazy, John."

" Very like," returned he in an absent tone. He was looking at a certain chintz-covered elbow-chair in the chimney corner ; it had been his mother's chair, and he could remember quite well the pleasant evening hours when she used to sit knitting and chatting to his father after the labour of the day.

Yonder had been his father's chair. John dropped into it now with a smile.

"Thou'rt moonstruck, I welly believe!" cried Molly, with a thump upon the dresser. "I've been watching thee all day, smirkin' to thyself and makin' sheep's eyes at yon poor little cripple."

"Cripple!" cried her master, springing up with a fierce look.

"Well, but what else is she?" grumbled the old woman, a little shamefacedly, however. "She has but the use o' one leg."

"She couldn't be no cleverer," returned John emphatically, "if she had the use o' four legs—nay, she couldn't be no cleverer."

"Eh, gaffer, you're never thinkin' o' coortin' her? A stranger fro' Liverpool, wi' an owd feyther as helpless as hersel', and not a penny-piece to her fortune I'll warrant! We'd have 'em both to keep an' do for."

"Well," said John sternly, "'tis time somebody did for her. Now, owd lass, get tea ready—that's what thou'd best do. Howd thy din and get tea ready."

She went out again. The old man was wandering up and down the garden path, and Jessie was singing to herself as she sat in her barrow. John halted by her side, and stood looking down at her and fumbling in his pocket. Presently he extracted a slip of paper and handed it to her; it was that on which she had written his own name.

"Ye did that for me," said he, with a bashful grin, "but ye didn't do it right. Eh, ye munnot be vexed—I mun out wi' it—— This here paper wants summat, and *I* want summat—terrible bad. It wants," he went on, pointing with his big forefinger to the blank

space before his name, "it wants summat wrote here, and I want same thing. It wants a—Missus."

Jessie started and looked at him almost piteously.

"Nay, my dear, don't ye be scared. It's God's truth I'm tellin' ye. I want ye—I want ye for my wife."

She gazed at him with a quivering lip.

"Oh, you are good," she cried, "you are too good. But I couldn't let you marry me—you only want to marry me because you are sorry for me."

"Nought o' the kind," said John stoutly. "I could do wi' ye very well—I'm real fond of ye, my dear. I think I was fond of ye from the minute I clapped eyes on ye. I tell ye plain I never noticed no woman before, an' if ye won't have me I'll stay single all my days."

"But—father?" she faltered.

"Eh, I could do wi' the owd lad too," cried he good-humouredly. "He'd keep ye company by times when I'm busy, and he'd keep *me* company of an evenin' wi' 's pipe."

In the silence that followed he could hear the beating of her heart. A great wave of tenderness swept over him.

"Come, my lass," he said, "trust me! I love you true—I'll love ye always. Will ye take me?"

As he stretched out his arms her two small fluttering hands went out in answer, and with a cry the little woodpecker nestled in his breast.

THE "TALLYGRAFT".

THE post-office of Riverton was situated at a turn of the road, and lay on the outskirts of the village. It was only when a stranger was close to the door that he identified it as a post-office at all, for the notice-board announcing the fact was almost hidden beneath an array of brooms, pots and pans, and other appurtenances of the general shop, in one corner of which his Majesty's business was transacted. Mrs. Courage's patrons belonged for the most part to the rustic community immediately surrounding her, and she carried on a brisk trade in soap, bacon and candles, unbleached calico and flannelette. It was such a small, dark little place, and so much overcrowded with wares, that the post-office department was squeezed into a very remote corner, and little Miss Goobey, who had presided over it for more than twenty years, was so slight and insignificant herself that a chance visitor would scarcely have noticed her.

When Solomon Bugg made his way up to the species of little sentry-box in which she habitually sat, one autumn morning, he rapped sharply on the counter once or twice before he perceived the outline of her little figure.

"Yes, sir?" said Miss Goobey interrogatively.

"Oh, ye're there, be ye?" said Solomon Bugg. "It's you, Miss Goobey? Dalled if I could make out who 'twas a-settin' there in the dark."

"You don't often come to our post-office, do you?" queried the little woman, laughing.

She had a pleasant, faded face, and a pleasant, gentle little voice; everybody liked Miss Goobey, who had, indeed, carried herself through her forty odd years of life with unvarying modesty and good nature. While she kept herself to herself, as the saying went, and worked hard for her living, she had a kind word for every one, and though she did not possess a single surviving relation, she had many friends.

No greater contrast, perhaps, could have been presented to the retiring figure of the little spinster than that of Solomon Bugg, whose big, burly form reached almost to the ceiling of the shop, so that his good-natured, grey-whiskered face jostled the hams and flitches which hung therefrom.

Extending one great hand now, he endeavoured to shake Miss Goobey's beneath the grating which fenced her off, and, finding that impossible, nodded instead. She noted that the hand was the left one, and looking closer observed that he carried his right arm in a sling.

"Have you hurt yourself, Mr. Bugg?" she inquired.

"Well, I don't know about hurtin' myself," he returned. "I've broke my arm."

"Oh, that's bad!" said Miss Goobey.

"'Tis what brings me here," resumed Solomon. "I want to send a tallygraft to America. There bain't no

way o' tallygrafting at our post-office. Will ye write it for me?"

"To be sure," returned Miss Goobey, drawing a form towards her, and taking up a pencil.

"It's to America," announced Solomon. "'Mrs. Elsworth, Oldsprings, near Buffalo City, U.S.A. Wife dead—arm broke—want housekeeper—come immediate. BUGG.'"

Mr. Bugg fired off each word as though it were a pistol-shot, with a frowning pause between; it was evident that the composition had cost him much effort, but had taken definite and immutable shape in his mind.

Miss Goobey duly wrote the message, making no comment thereon; but a loud "Bless me!" from the counter opposite denoted that Mrs. Courage was an interested listener, while Mrs. Fripp, who had come in to buy a packet of starch, dived under an intervening flitch to have a good stare at Solomon Bugg, who was an old acquaintance of hers.

"Be you a-goin' to trant over a woman all the way from America?" she inquired in surprise.

"Well, I can't get on no ways now," returned Bugg. "'Twas bad enough when my missus was took—a wold man, same as myself, wi' no childern, and not so much as a sister to turn to; but now as my arm be broke 'tis worse nor ever—'tis past bearin'. 'Tis a 'ousekeeper what I do want—and Sally Elsworth 'ull do me very well. I've a-knowned her for years afore she went out abroad."

"Oh, an' did ye?" said little Miss Goobey with interest. "Sally Elsworth! Let's see. She used to be Sally Barnes, didn't she?"

"That's her," agreed Mr. Bugg. "'E-es. Well, how much 'ull that be, Miss Goobey?"

Phœbe counted rapidly.

"Seven words for the address—then nine—it'll come to a lot, I'm afraid, Mr. Bugg—one pound twelve."

"What!" exclaimed Solomon, aghast.

"One pound twelve," repeated Miss Goobey. "'Tis two shillin' a word, you know, Mr. Bugg—it has to go by cable."

"One pound twelve!" repeated Solomon. "There, it do scarce seem worth while to spend all that money."

"A letter would only cost twopence halfpenny," said Phœbe, making the suggestion somewhat regrettably, however.

"How long would a letter take to go out?" inquired Bugg.

"It depends on the mails," returned Miss Goobey importantly, "and it depends on where your friend lives. Ten days or a fortnight, I should say."

"That won't do!" said Bugg resolutely. "I couldn't wait so long as that."

"Perhaps ye needn't say so much," suggested Phœbe.

Taking up the document, she read it again: "'Wife dead'—need you say that, Mr. Bugg?"

"I d' 'low I'll have to say that," said Solomon; "she wouldn't come wi'out she were sure o' that—she never could a-bear Martha."

"Well, p'raps you needn't say about your arm," hinted Phœbe.

Mrs. Courage came out from behind the counter, and drew near, with a disapproving air.

"I'd ha' thought ye might ha' found somebody nearer home," she announced, for the second time.

Solomon reflected for a minute or two, his lower lip thrust out, his brows knit.

"I'll ha' to tell her about my arm," he said at length; "else maybe she'd think there's no such great hurry. I can't get on wi' the milkin' nor nothin'. I do have to get a boy to drive when I do do a bit o' trantin'. She's bound to come to once if she's to be any good to I."

"Wife—dead—arm—broke," recapitulated Phoebe. "'Want housekeeper'—need you say that? It 'ud be four shillin's off."

Mr. Bugg pursed up his lips and shook his head knowingly.

"I think I'll say that," he observed, after a pause. "I d' low I'd better say that. I don't want no mistakes made."

"Ye mean the 'ooman might fancy 'twas a offer you was makin' her?" said Mrs. Fripp, laughing. "She'd think you was wantin' to marry her, you reckon?"

Miss Goobey's pale face flushed, but no one saw it, and she cried hastily: "I really think any woman 'ud have more sense than that. Why, she hasn't seen Mr. Bugg for years and years. She wouldn't think he'd go and make her an offer all in a minute like that from the other side of the world."

"Best be on the safe side," said Solomon firmly. "It 'ull be four shillin' well spent, though it be a lot o' money."

Mrs. Courage laughed and tossed her head.

"It 'ull all come to the same thing in the end," she said. "You and Sally 'ull be fallin' over pulpit afore she've been a month in the place."

"I don't know about that," returned he, with a grin, "but I'm not one as 'ud like to buy a pig in a poke anyhow. Well, Miss Goobey, that there tallygraft 'ull have to go just as it be, for I must have 'come immediate,' else she won't hurry."

Phœbe carried out his injunctions without further protest, and Mr. Bugg, with a sigh of relief, turned to leave the shop. He paused, however, before he reached the threshold, and came back a step or two.

"How long do ye think it'll be afore she comes?" he inquired.

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Goobey; "it all depends on where she lives, doesn't it?"

"Oldsprings," said Solomon meditatively. "That do sound a old-fashioned sort o' place, don't it? 'Tis somewhere up the country she did say once when she did write home—a wild, outlandish place, most like."

"Well," cried Phœbe, "she mightn't come the very minute she heard from you."

"Oh, she'll come so fast as she can," exclaimed Bugg. "How long do they ships take in comin'?"

"Ten days or a fortnight," Phœbe was beginning, when Mrs. Courage's louder and more emphatic voice bore her down:—

"It'll be a month at the very least, Mr. Bugg, afore the 'ooman can get to 'ee. There's the journey out abroad to begin wi', an' then the ship, an' more travelin' to be done when she do get to England. No, ye

can't look for her to be here afore a month, poor soul."

Solomon's face lengthened, and he turned away without uttering another word.

On the following Sunday little Miss Goobey decided to stroll in the direction of the hamlet where Mr. Bugg's home was situated. It was a mere cluster of houses, of which by far the most important was Solomon's own. This was a quaint thatched building standing back some little distance from the road, flanked by a good-sized barton and a line of well-kept sheds. Solomon, with a white "pinner" over his Sunday clothes, was engaged in planting out a number of small pansy roots. He looked up with a startled air as Miss Goobey accosted him, and hastily dropped the trowel with which he had been working.

"It don't seem quite right for Sunday, I know," he remarked, noting Phœbe's scandalised expression ; "but there, d'ye see, 'tis terr'ble hard to find time for these 'ere little odd jobs when a body's disabled same as I be. It do take I twice so long to do the leastest bit o' work as it 'ud take anybody wi' two hands. I do want these 'ere to ha' took firm hold o' the ground afore Sally do come, d'ye see? They'm bound to be a bit droopy-like at first. 'Tis to be hoped they'll pick up afore she comes ; she be terr'ble fond o' flowers, Sally be."

"I'm sure 'tis very kind o' you to take so much thought for Mrs. Elsworth," returned Phœbe, still disapprovingly.

"She did ought to be comfortable," rejoined

Solomon reflectively. "Step inside, do, Miss Goo-bey, and see all what I've done."

He led the way into the house, pointing out with great pride various labours which he had considerably undertaken on Mrs. Elsworth's behalf.

"I did manage to put this 'ere trellis-work to rights, d'ye see, and trimmed honeysuckle proper—the rose-tree 'ull ha' more room now. I d' 'low Sally 'ull like to sit in the porch of an evenin' arter her work's over. I done a bit of whitewashin' here in the kitchen myself—pretty good job that for a man what has but the one hand, bain't it? And I did paint thikky settle—'twill be nice for Sally to sit here of a cold day—the back and arms do keep off draught so nice; and here, look-see—"

He threw open the parlour door as he spoke, and turned his beaming countenance towards Phœbe.

"D'ye chance to notice what I've got here?"

Phœbe's eyes wandered round the room; the china on the mantel-shelf, the corner cupboard with its polished doors, the Kidderminster carpet, the horse-hair sofa—these were familiar enough, and she was turning towards Mr. Bugg with a somewhat puzzled expression, when, with a triumphant flourish of his one available hand, he pointed out a brand-new rocking-chair which occupied a proud position in the centre of the hearthrug.

"I did buy that for her," exclaimed Mr. Bugg. "There, I minded how she once did write home as she was fair taken up wi' the 'Merican rocking-chairs, an' couldn't think how she ever done wi'out 'em over

here ; so I did think to myself 't 'ud be a nice surprise if I was to have one all ready."

"A very nice surprise indeed," replied Miss Goobey, with an unaccountable sinking of her lonely little heart. With a stifled sigh she turned to leave the room.

"You'll reckon she'll be pleased, don't ye ?" inquired Mr. Bugg, somewhat crestfallen at her attitude. "You think she mid very well make herself happy ?"

The disappointment in his tone touched Phœbe, and she faced him, speaking bravely, if with unconscious wistfulness.

"She ought to be happy, indeed," she replied ; "she'll have a comfortable home and a kind master —maybe something different to a master," she added, with a wavering smile.

Solomon chuckled.

"Maybe so—maybe so," he cried ; "but we'll not say nothin' about that yet—not just yet. 'Look before ye leap,' as the sayin' goes."

"Good-day," said Phœbe, crossing the kitchen.

"Bide an' take a cup o' tea now ye be here," cried Solomon, struck by a sudden thought. "There, ye mid jist so well do it as not—there's lots o' time afore church, bain't there? I'll fill kettle in a minute."

"Let me do it," suggested Phœbe eagerly. "I'll take off my cape and my gloves. I'd like to do it, really."

"Well, two hands are better nor one so well as two heads," returned Bugg jovially. "'Tis a true sayin' that, both ways. I've a-been awful lonesome ever since my poor wold 'ooman was took."

Miss Goobey paused with the kettle in her hand, and heaved another sigh:—

“I’ve been lonely all my life,” she said.

Solomon eyed her compassionately, and searched his brains for some remark which should be at once consolatory and cheering; but not finding any, he merely cleared his throat in an awkward sort of way, and little Miss Goobey hastened to the pump.

When she returned all sign of her previous emotion seemed to have vanished, and she went about her self-imposed tasks as gaily and deftly as anybody could wish.

“Now you sit down, Mr. Bugg, and let me manage. This is quite a little outing for me, you know, and I’m glad to help you. Here’s the cloth—a nice clean one for Sunday——”

“E-es, Susanna, the ‘oman what do come in of a mornin’, left that ready,” interpolated Solomon.

“And a nice fresh loaf,” continued Phœbe—“a pat o’ butter—a beautiful pat o’ butter—Mr. Bugg! while kettle’s boiling, would you like me to make you some buttered toast?”

“Ah, that I should, my dear,” he returned heartily. “There, ‘tis a thing I be terr’ble fond of, but I haven’t tasted it not since my poor missus went to the New House. She did use to make it for I once in a while for a treat.”

“Well, I’ll make it now,” said Phœbe, kneeling down before the fire.

Solomon watched her while she toasted round after round of bread, her own face growing very red the

while, and becoming ever more and more animated. When at last her preparations were concluded and they sat down to the table together, Solomon said within himself that she was as pleasant a little body as a man mid wish to see.

He was not very talkative by nature, and therefore his share in the ensuing conversation was chiefly confined to monosyllables ; but he delivered himself of these with such a cheerful expression, nodded so knowingly, and smiled so broadly and frequently, that nobody could have deemed him a dull companion. Certainly not Phœbe Goobey. She, too, smiled and nodded, and made little darts at the buttered toast with bird-like briskness ; and she chatted enough for two. She told Mr. Bugg "a many things," as he subsequently reflected—how, so far from being a townswoman, as he had imagined, she was a farmer's daughter, and used in her young days to milk cows and cram chickens ; how she knew all about churning and cheesemaking ; how she even used to drive her father's market-cart at busy times.

"Well now!" exclaimed Mr. Bugg, eyeing her in amazement. After a ruminating pause he continued : "Who'd ha' thought that?" and, at the end of an interval of further reflection, he cried with a jovial laugh : "Shouldn't wonder but what you could do a bit o' trantin' if you was put to it, even at this time o' day".

"What an idea!" exclaimed Phœbe, blushing.

Silence fell between them for a moment, and then she invited her host to partake of another cup of tea.

He pushed forward his cup, surveying her the while

with an expression which puzzled her. The conversation languished, and Phœbe, putting a hand to her hot cheek, inwardly reproached herself for having talked too much.

When she rose to take her leave he accompanied her to the gate, but, instead of throwing it open for her, clutched it fast.

"I d' 'low you go out a-walkin' most Sundays," he remarked tentatively.

Miss Goobey admitted that she did.

"Tell 'ee what then," cried Solomon; "ye mid jist so well as not walk out this way next Sunday. We mid have another tea-party."

Phœbe hesitated.

"Why not?" inquired Mr. Bugg, almost fiercely.

"Why not, indeed," returned Miss Goobey hastily. "I dare say you'll have had news by that time, Mr. Bugg."

Solomon creaked the gate open very slowly, and stood aside to let her pass.

"Noos?" he queried.

"From Mrs. Elsworth, you know. You will probably get a letter from her next week."

"What for?" asked Mr. Bugg.

"Why, I suppose she'll write to say if she's coming or not."

"Oh, she'll come," said Solomon, in a tone of absolute conviction, yet without any great elation of manner; "she'll come fast enough; she'll not need to write."

But when, on the following Sunday, little Miss

Goobey arrived at his gate, she found Solomon Bugg awaiting her with a letter in his hand.

"Come your ways in, my dear," he cried; "come in. I've summat to show 'ee."

Phœbe stepped across the threshold, and stood by the hearth, palpitating, for Mr. Bugg's expression was portentous.

"If you've no objections, Miss Goobey," said Solomon, "I'd be obliged if ye'd step into the parlour."

Phœbe obediently stepped in, and Mr. Bugg, after ceremoniously closing the door, drew forward the new rocking-chair.

"Take a seat, Miss Goobey," he commanded.

Phœbe looked up protestingly, and Solomon pushed the chair a little nearer to her, pointing to it with so threatening an air that she sank down on it without another word.

"I'd be obliged," pursued Mr. Bugg, with the same stern solemnity of tone which had been noticeable throughout, "I'd be obliged if ye'd kindly cast an eye over this 'ere."

Taking the letter from its envelope, he spread it out on Phœbe's knees, and she managed with some difficulty to decipher its contents. It was a lengthy and diffuse document from Mrs. Elsworth, conveying her alarm and surprise at the suddenness of Mr. Bugg's summons, and displaying a somewhat indelicate anxiety that he should state his intentions more fully. Mrs. Elsworth was very comfortable where she was, she remarked, and before she gave up her home and sold her furniture she would like to know exactly what she

was to expect in the future. She hinted further that it must be made worth her while in one way or another to come so far, and announced that she could in no case undertake the journey unless all expenses were defrayed.

Phœbe looked up diffidently, as she restored the letter to its envelope, and did not venture to hazard an opinion.

"What d'ye think o' that?" inquired Solomon, after an expectant pause.

"Well, I—it—it seems rather strange," said Phœbe faintly.

"Strange!" shouted Solomon, thumping the table. "It's a dalled impudent letter—that's what 'tis. The 'ooman bain't what I did think her."

"I suppose not," commented Miss Goobey hesitatingly.

"I'm sure not!" shouted Mr. Bugg. "Why, she's as good as asked me to marry her. 'Tis what she be a-amin' at—'tis there plain to be seen. That bain't a very nice thing for a respectable 'ooman to do."

"No, it isn't," Phœbe conceded; "still, of course—she's comfortable where she is, she says—"

"Well, she may stay where she be for me!" retorted Solomon warmly. "Pretty cool I do call it. There, I haven't see'd her for nigh upon fifteen year—I shouldn't know her again, very like. I bain't a-goin' to promise myself to any 'ooman till I've a notion what she do look like."

"That's reasonable," Miss Goobey admitted.

"An' axin' me for her passage-money, too," con-

tinued Solomon. "Pretty good cheek, that is. Why, if she sold her few traps she'd ha' plenty o' dibs. I was offerin' her a good home and every comfort—that did ought to satisfy any 'oman as wasn't altogether covetous—but I can see she's one as wants everything for herself. She do never give a thought to I. There, she mid ha' knowed I must be at a terr'ble loss when I went to the expense o' sendin' her a tallygraft all across the sea. Why, if I was to bide till I wrote out to her again, and she waited to sell her things, I d' low my arm 'ud be well again and I could do wi'out her."

"Very likely," agreed Phœbe. "Still," she went on after a pause, "I fancy when winter came on you'd find yourself very lonely without another person in the house."

Mr. Bugg's face relaxed.

"I d' low I would," he said. "I reckon to have somebody else here by that time, but I'll not need to trant her all the way over from America."

He sat suddenly down on a corner of the horse-hair-covered sofa.

"Do ye know why I axed ye to sit in that chair, my dear?" he inquired, bending forward with a delighted smile.

As Miss Goobey did not answer, he continued triumphantly: "'Tis because I've a-made up my mind for to ax ye to come to this 'ere house as Missus."

"Oh, Mr. Bugg!" gasped Phœbe.

"Ye'd like it, wouldn't ye?" said Solomon. "Well, an' so would I. I've a-been a-thinkin' this week back

as I made a mistake in wantin' Sally to come over—there, 'twill save a deal o' trouble and expense, an' I d' 'low I'll make 'ee a good husband, my dear."

"I'm sure you will," said Phœbe, and the tears sprang to her eyes.

"I did always like ye," pursued Solomon, who had become unwontedly garrulous, "but the notion never come to me till last Sunday, when you was a-talkin' about bein' able to milk an' that, an' when you was a-tellin' me how lonesome ye did feel yourself, then I says to myself, 'Well, Solomon Bugg, you be a fool. There you mid ha' made both yourself and her so happy as could be wi'out no trouble at all, if ye had but thought on't.' But we'll make ourselves happy now, won't us?"

Phœbe nodded, and, leaning forward, he took her little hand in his and shook it warmly.

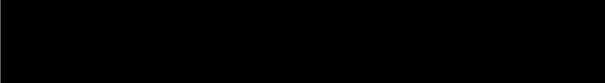
"Well, now," he resumed, after a pause; "the first thing I do want ye to do for me is to let Sally Elsworth know I've a-changed my mind."

"Oh!" exclaimed Phœbe.

"'E-es," cried Solomon firmly; "it'll not take ye long, my dear, for 'tis but a few words I do want ye to say—'Mrs. Elsworth, Oldsprings, near Buffalo City, U.S.A. You need not come. BUGG.'"

"Do you mean me to send a cable to-morrow?" inquired Phœbe, bewildered.

"Meanin' a tallygraft?" said Solomon. "Nothin' o' the kind, my dear. I bain't a-goin' to waste no more money on she. A post-card 'ull do."



“FORTY-BAGS.”

MARY DOYLE was the head laundry-maid at a certain big rambling Irish country-house. The laundry over which she reigned supreme was a two-storied building adjoining the stables. The bleaching-green was opposite, a little to the right ; it was raised to the level of the ironing-room on the upper floor, and was reached by a flight of stone steps.

A very wonderful, mysterious, beautiful place was this bleaching-green—at least in the eyes of the children of the house, who used to clasp each other's hands very tightly and followed Mary with awe-stricken faces on the rare occasions when she permitted them to ascend to it ; for the entrance was guarded by a rusty gate and Mary kept the key in her pocket. But once on the top of those dark steps how marvellous was the prospect. The fair inclined plain of sunlit green, which went sloping upwards to such a height that when one had climbed to the top one could look over the stable roof and into the yard ; the clumps of flowering bushes, lilacs, laburnums, syringas, blossoming thorns, all blooming in lonely beauty, for no one was allowed to so much as finger a leaf of these sacred groves. And behind there was a copse more mysterious still, a dense growth of hazel and elder and laurel.

Mary usually stood stock-still in the midst of her domain while the children clung together and whispered. She was a tall, strong, high-shouldered woman, with a hard-featured face, and iron-grey hair which every year retreated more and more under her black chenille net ; for, in spite of her plain face and stooping form, Mary was vain, and exceedingly touchy on the question of her age. She was close upon sixty, and never would own to more than half her years ; indeed, when the census collector came round she boldly sent in her age as twenty-nine. She was given moreover to hint distantly at certain romantic episodes in her career, and even to suggest, darkly and with increased severity of aspect, that it might not be too late yet, and that maybe she'd be takin' every one by surprise wan of these days—but no matter !

Her fellow-servants laughed at her, but behind her back, and the children tittered too, when they heard their nurses discuss old Mary's prospects of establishing herself in life, and opine that he must be an elegant sort of young man who would take up with her. But they were very respectful in Mary's presence, for she shared with the doctor and the sweep the bugbear honours of the nursery. If, as occasionally happened, somebody's cup "leaked over the top" and spoiled a clean tablecloth, young Sir or Miss was immediately threatened with the wrath of Mary Doyle. If white frocks were damaged, or pinafores soiled, the culprit was asked : "What would Mary Doyle say ?"

As a matter of fact Mary Doyle usually said a good deal ; she was afflicted with a mysterious and long-

standing complaint called “Heart-scalding,” spasms of which used to attack her after such delinquencies.

On Saturday mornings she used sometimes to lead the children with a damp and crinkly hand to the ironing-room, where piles of their own small garments lay ready to be conveyed to the house. There were four little girls in that house, and one boy, still small enough to be in petticoats, and they all wore white—donning clean clothes every day before dinner. Imagine therefore the mountains of starched frocks, the stacks of carefully ironed pinafores, not to speak of underwear of all denominations, on which Mary and her underlings had bestowed their labours.

“And to think that the whole of them ‘ull be comin’ back to me again dirty!” Mary would exclaim tragically; “I declare the heart is scalded out of me.”

Feeling like small criminals, the children would creep down the stairs, and out through the laundry proper, with its steamy soapy smell, its row of stooping figures, and in the corner under the table Spot curled up in his bed asleep.

Spot was a small white terrier with the most beautiful little head in the world, but with a figure—well when it is mentioned that Mary daily provided him with a bowlful of food large enough to sustain a mastiff, further comment on Spot’s figure is unnecessary. He was an ill-tempered little fellow and would growl and snap savagely at any one incautious enough to approach his bed—always excepting Mary, whose proximity invariably threw him into a wriggling ecstasy of delight. This allusion to Spot brings me to my story proper,

for it was owing to Spot's unwilling generosity that Forty-Bags came to put his trust in Mary Doyle.

The dinner-hour was just over; the yard bell had clanged out its summons to gardener and plough-boy; Spot, sitting upright in his bed, had just finished the series of long-drawn howls with which he invariably protested against the bell-ringing in question, and Mary Doyle, with Spot's bowl piled even higher than usual, was slowly advancing from the kitchen premises to her own, when she caught sight of Forty-Bags leaning against the yard wall.

"Forty-Bags" was a beggar-man well known in the district, teased, tolerated and regularly supported by a number of humble patrons. He made his rounds with the utmost regularity, receiving alms indeed from certain big houses, but halting more frequently by cabin doors. A sack half full of potatoes hung over his shoulder, now, one of the many which were festooned round his person. It was indeed this fact that earned him his title of "Forty-Bags," though he was sometimes called "Lord John," from a way he had of bragging about his aristocratic connections.

He was a tall old fellow with a ragged beard, and a glittering eye, a face browned and weather-beaten till it resembled leather, and attire consisting of layers of tatters of every conceivable shape and hue, comprised amongst the rest a fragment of red waistcoat of which he was inordinately proud. He was believed to be an "innocent" and acted up to the character, talking in a wild rhodomontade and cutting strange capers. His advent was invariably hailed with delight, and folks

would laugh till they held their sides at Forty-Bag's antics.

Mary stood still a moment to survey him, sourly, and noted how the labourers were gathering round him, though the bell had stopped, and work should have been resumed for the afternoon.

“Won't ye jig a bit for us to-day, Lord John?” cried one.

“Do now, your Lordship!” urged another. “Sure there's nobody hereabouts can hold a candle to ye at the double!”

“Will I hold your sack for ye, Forty-Bags?” exclaimed an officious garden-boy.

Forty-Bags clutched the sack in question, dealing out a left-hander to the lad, which sent him staggering back.

“Troth, I believe it's full of gould it is!” cried the youngster, no whit abashed.

The others closed round the old man, laughing, jeering, endeavouring by every means to provoke him either to his usual flow of eloquence, or to the fantastic performance with which he usually regaled them. But he would not be drawn. He grinned vacantly, nodded, asserted in muffled tones that it was altogether too hot for the dancin'; and finally catching sight of Mary and her bowl of provender, he sidled towards her, inquiring what he'd be doin' leppin' an' dancin' in the heat, when herself over beyant was aither bringin' him out such an elegant lot o' victuals.

“Hothin' indeed!” retorted Mary. “I've somethin' else to be doin' nor dancin' attendance on the likes o' you.”

But Forty-Bags, circling round her with a curious staccato step and sundry uncanny twitchings of both face and person, jerked the bowl from her grasp.

"God bless ye!" he remarked fervently, as he hastened away with it. "Sure ye wouldn't be givin' it to a dog, when ye have a Christian famishin' for want of it."

Mary eyed him with a cold look, and, turning, went slowly back to the house for a fresh supply; and the steward, arriving at the same moment, broke up the little group who were vociferously cheering the beggar, wishing "more power" to him and clapping him on the back for having got the better of "that crabby ould maid!"

When Miss Doyle reappeared the yard was deserted with the exception of Forty-Bags himself, who was seated on one of Mary's window-sills, with the bowl beside him, the contents of which were rapidly vanishing.

As she approached he looked up penitently, yet with a twinkle in his eye.

"I 'umbly ax your pardon, ma'am," he said, "but 'twas starved out an' out I was."

"Dear knows I don't begrudge it ye," said Mary, relaxing in some measure.

"I'm starved out an' out," repeated the old man, "an' tired—God knows it's tired I am!"

Mary's face resumed its severity.

"Ye had a right to give over leppin' an' jiggin' that way, an' yerself as ould as ye are," she observed.

"Sure, what can I do?" he returned sorrowfully. "I haven't a hole nor a corner to lay me head in."

He paused, and then struck the window-sill with his lean fist.

“I’d die sooner nor go to the workhouse!” he exclaimed.

“Ah, God help ye!” ejaculated Mary.

There was a pause, during which she surveyed him curiously.

“I believe you’re no more mad nor myself,” she said, after a moment. “What in the name o’ goodness do ye carry on wid all that nonsense for?”

Forty-Bags gazed at her sharply, his eyes twinkling more and more, his mouth slowly expanding, his whole face assuming an expression at once elated and incomparably sly. In truth the man *was* a little mad, and found it politic to appear more so, but he received this tribute to his sanity as the very highest compliment. Presently, however, his face clouded over:—

“A man must live the best way he can,” he said, “and there’s not much life, good or bad, left in me. I’ll die with my head in a ditch.”

“For the Lord’s sake, don’t be talking that way,” exclaimed the woman in a shocked voice.

“What way else can I talk? They’ll find me dead by the side of the road, an’ they’ll take what little I’ve got, and lave me to be buried by the parish.”

“Ah, me poor fella!” returned Mary, with a kind of contemptuous sympathy, “sure you wouldn’t be worth robbin’ wherever ye was found, God help ye!”

Again the sly look overspread Forty-Bags’ face. There was no hilarity mingled with the expression this time, however, but rather a kind of pathos.

“An’ that’s true,” he assented, after a pause. “No-body’s such a fool as to want to go robbin’ me.”

He set down the empty bowl, and turned towards her :—

“ But I'll tell ye the truth, mum——”

“ Miss,” interrupted Mary, bridling.

“ I ax yer pardon, miss—my eyes is growin' dim, ye see.” (Nevertheless they leered knowingly.) “ Well, miss, as I was sayin', I'm that tired an' w'ary I'd be contint enough to lie down in the gully-hole if I could but make sure I'd be buried decent. But the thought is ever and always before my mind, even when I'm dancin' an' crackin' jokes wid the boys, ‘ Maybe I'll drop down dead this minute,’ says I to meself, ‘ an' then they'll just throw me out an' let the parish get me’. An' others times when I'm stravaguin' along the road by meself an' ud give the world to lie down an' take a bit of a rest, I thinks again, ‘ Maybe it's here I'll die an' some stranger 'll come an' sthrip all I have off of me’. I declare to Heaven I haven't had a wink of sleep these three nights.”

At this moment the sound of an approaching foot-fall caused Mary to step round the angle of the laundry, and inspect the yard. The under laundry-woman, Mrs. Curly by name, was making her way through the gate at the farther end.

Mrs. Curly was no favourite of Mary's for she had had the audacity to marry a year or so before, and had even been so ill-advised during the past month as to leave the laundry in the middle of a busy day's work, and go home and have a baby. It was true she had wasted as little time as possible over this achievement, and had resumed her place at the tubs within a week ;

nevertheless Mary was not pleased with her, and had treated her since the event with a cold and distant severity.

“Is there somebody coming?” exclaimed Forty-Bags, starting up and clutching at his sacks and bundles.

“Only the woman that does be helpin’ me,” returned Mary impatiently. “Ye’ve no call to be afeard. The poor creature’s lost for want of a sleep,” she murmured to herself; then, addressing the old man again: “Look at here now. Get up out o’ that an’ I’ll take ye to a place where ye can have your sleep out, and nobody ‘ll be troublin’ ye.”

Catching him by the arm and half-pushing, half-dragging him along, she piloted him to the drying-ground, and unlocking the gate, propelled him and his various paraphernalia up the steps, and into a remote corner behind a syringa-bush.

“Lie down there,” she commanded, “and have your sleep out, an’ I’ll come an’ call ye in the cool of the evenin’ when there’s nobody about.”

He looked at her for a moment, suspiciously, and she drew herself up much offended.

“Ye dirty ould fella!” she exclaimed, “I give ye me word I wouldn’t touch yerself nor anythin’ about ye for the Queen’s crown.”

He drew a long breath.

“In the name of God I’ll trust ye,” he said solemnly, and dropped down upon the ground, gathering all his goods close to him, and resting his head on the biggest sack.

Mary stood looking down at him, with her brows drawn together and her underlip thrust out; then muttering: "The creature has no sense," she made her way down the steps again, locked the gate, and reached the laundry just as the panting Mrs. Curly turned the corner.

"I wonder ye took the throuble to come back at all," remarked Mary sarcastically, "it's gettin' on for three o'clock, so it is."

"It was the child kept me," faltered the little mother remorsefully. "Whatever the poor ould gran' done on him I couldn't tell ye, but when I got home he was roarin' an' bawlin' till I thought he'd be convulted before me eyes. I hadn't the heart to go lave him agin till I had him pacified."

"Why, then, if you're goin' to stop at home every time the child cries, ye'd best stop out o' this altogether," retorted Mary acidly. "There, get them aprons out o' soak an' don't stand starin' at me as if there was nothin' to be done."

Having by this display of authority reinstated herself in her own opinion—for her conscience had previously pricked her for her culpable weakness with regard to Forty-Bags—Miss Doyle banged down Spot's bowl before him, twitched a few fine things off the line, and proceeded to clear-starch them with her usual deftness, pausing every now and then to ejaculate aloud various comments on Mrs. Curly's folly:—

"Mercy on us! The woman thinks the world's comin' to an end because the child let a bit of a yell . . . Bless us an' save us, it's aisy seen it's the

first he is. . . . A body 'ud think the ould granny 'ud be able to keep the little wan quiet an' her aſther rarin' a dozen childher of her own."

Poor Mrs. Curly's head stooped lower and lower over her washing-trough, but she ventured on no response, though one or two of the younger servants, who came out according to custom to assist Mary in the afternoon, nudged each other indignantly, and observed in whispers that the ould one beyant was gettin' more cross-grained every day.

The seven o'clock bell duly proclaimed that the hour for repose had come; a procession of labourers and farm-horses passed through the gate at the far end of the yard; Mrs. Curly caught up her bonnet and flew out of the door, without pausing to hear her superior's sarcastic adjuration not to let the grass grow under her feet, else maybe she'd find the child cryin' agin.

The farm-horses were stabled for the night, the men had departed, and Mary, after listening till the last step had died away, drew her key from her pocket and proceeded cautiously towards the drying-ground.

The rays of the evening sun that left the lower part of the slope in shadow had crept up to the corner where Forty-Bags lay still sound asleep. His battered old hat had fallen off, and his poor unkempt head was fully exposed to the pitiless glow; every furrow on the brow stood out, every line in the worn face; a wanton little breeze toyed with his ragged white hair and beard.

Mary stood looking down at him with the same expression of perplexity and compassion which had before marked her usually harsh face.

"The poor ould fella!" she said to herself. "He's sleepin' as innicent as a child. I wisht to goodness I could lave him so, but it wouldn't be right."

Nevertheless she turned away, and went very softly down the steps and into the house. There she marched with the step of a dragoon, down the passages and across the servants' hall, to a particular cupboard in the corner, where she kept her private store of tea and sugar. Mary always bought her own tea which was of better quality than that consumed by her mistress; it was her custom, moreover, to make this refreshing beverage for herself at any moment when she felt inclined, and without regard to the common meal-time of the other servants.

Her proceedings on this occasion therefore excited no remark. She reached down her small brown teapot, measured out three spoonfuls from her private caddy, possessed herself of her own cup and plate—both being of old-fashioned egg-shell china with raised lilac flowers on a white ground—and having further provided herself with a loaf, knife and butter, and duly "wet the tay" from the kitchen kettle, stalked out of the house into the laundry again.

"Herself has one of her quare fits on her," remarked the kitchenmaid, looking after her; but no further comment was made.

Having poured out the tea in her own precincts, and prepared one or two slices of thick bread-and-butter, Mary returned to Forty-Bags, who remained still in the position in which she had left him.

"Forty-Bags," she called cautiously.

The sleeping figure did not stir.

“It’s time to be gettin’ up now, Forty-Bags,” insisted she, and stretching out her foot in its flat slipper, she pushed him with it.

Forty-Bags turned over a little, and one hand twitched, but he gave no further sign of life.

“Get up out o’ that, ye ould sckamer!” cried Mary; and, setting down the cup at a safe distance, she bent over him, and in spite of her previous asseverations shook him vigorously by the shoulder.

“Get up, I tell ye; I can’t be wastin’ my time here all night.”

With a shrill, quavering scream, that nevertheless was strangled midway, Forty-Bags woke, stared at her with starting eyes, and then hurriedly drawing his various bags towards him, sat clutching them to his breast, a heap of quaking terror and misery.

“Ye ould gawm!” exclaimed Mary, with withering contempt. “What in the name o’ goodness are ye afeard of? I wouldn’t lay a finger on anything belongin’ to ye for the whole world. Sit up like a Christian and drink the beautiful cup o’ tay I’m aifter bringin’ ye, and then ye must be legging off out o’ this, for I have to lock up and go inside.”

Forty-Bags had by this time recovered his wits, and now fell to humble protestations of contrition and gratitude.

“I don’t know what in the world come over me, miss,” he added, “I’m afeard o’ me life to close me eyes, for when I do drop off I’m that dead asleep I don’t know where I am when first I wake up. That’s

the way it is wid me ye see, an' that's what makes me terrified o' lyin' down for a minit. Anybody might find me—and anybody might take the few little things I have from me."

"Now look-at here," said Mary impressively, "ye'll be losin' your life altogether, me poor man, if ye don't have your proper night's rest. Why don't ye lave whatever it is ye're so afeard o' losin'—your few shillin's or whatever it is ye do be carryin' about wid ye—why don't ye lave it somewhere safe where nobody'd be in danger o' finding it? I'm sure Father Macdonnell down below 'ud be glad to take charge of it for ye, an' ye could be sure it would be safe if the holy man was mindin' it for ye."

Forty-Bags set down his cup and surveyed her with his head on one side and his mouth screwed into the cunning secretive look she had before noticed.

"Maybe his Reverence 'ud want to go puttin' it in the bank," he said, "an' if I wanted to take it out again, maybe they wouldn't give it to a poor ould fella like me."

"The bank indeed," said Mary, with a crow of laughter. "Set ye up."

"Father Macdonnell's gettin' to be an ould man too," pursued Forty-Bags reflectively. "He might be the first to die, and who be gettin' my money then?"

"Ah, I haven't patience to be talkin' to ye!" cried Mary. "Why don't ye dig a hole and bury it yourself then? It'd be betther for ye to do that, nor go cartin' it about the countrhy, thinkin' every moment some one was comin' to rob ye."

The old fellow's jaw dropped, and he gazed at her earnestly; the idea was evidently new to him.

“Why don't ye do that, honest man?” pursued Mary, following up her advantage; her impatience to bring the interview to a close was supplemented by a real compassion for the forlorn old creature's plight.

“If I was to find some rale safe place,” he faltered, after a pause.

“I tell ye what,” cried she eagerly, “I'll go fetch a spade, and ye can dig a hole on the very spot which ye're lyin' on. Nobody ever sets foot here except myself, an' I keep the place locked up night an' day. It's as safe as the bank, an' ye can get at it whenever ye like.”

Forty-Bags leaned forward, a hand clutching either knee, his blue eyes scanning Mary's face with intense, almost fierce, inquiry, but she met his gaze without flinching.

“I've made ye the offer,” she said. “Ye can please yourself about takin' it or lavin' it. I'll pass ye me word never to lay a finger on whatever ye choose to lave here, an' to keep it safe till ye come for it again.”

“Will ye give me your word never to let on about it to any livin' soul?” he asked eagerly.

“That will I,” she returned. “I'll never open me lips about it to man or mortal, an' I'll never go next or nigh your hidin'-place or ax to see what's in it unless ye give me lave. Will that do ye?”

“That'll do me,” agreed Forty-Bags, after a minute. “There's one thing though,” after ruminating again with pursed lips and gathered brows, “if I was to fall sick or die—I'd like ye to go to it then.”

"Well, I could do that," said Mary, with a short laugh. "If I get word that you're sick I'll dig it up and send it to ye—"

"Bring it to me—bring it to me," interrupted Forty-Bags. "I'd not thrust any one only yourself."

"Well, well, I'll bring it to ye then," agreed Mary. "Ye don't thravel so far these times that I couldn't find ye aisy. An' if I get word ye're dead I'll bury ye."

"That's it," returned Forty-Bags, nodding contentedly; "bury me dacent. I'd like to be buried dacent. I'd like to have a bit of a wake for all friends."

"I'll bury ye as dacent as your money 'ull afford," conceded Mary. "Hurry up with your tay, now, an' I'll go for the spade. I can't stop here all night, ye know."

He caught up his cup again, and Mary betook herself to the tool-house near the cart-shed, presently returning with a spade.

"Will I dig," she inquired, "while you're lookin' out whatever it is you want buried?"

He eyed her shily:—

"Turn your back then," he said.

She obeyed with a short laugh and fell to work, first cutting out a large square sod and then digging vigorously beneath it. Her task was no light one, for the ground had been undisturbed for many years, and the roots of the bushes got in the way; nevertheless she had accomplished the digging of a fairly deep hole before Forty-Bags had collected his treasure.

"Don't turn round," he cried, almost with a scream as she rested on her spade.

“Ah, bad scran to the man! What in the world are ye doin’?”

No answer from Forty-Bags, but the sound of eager fumbling, accompanied now and then by faint chinks.

“It’s the wealth of the world ye’ve got there, I believe,” she called out jocosely, after a moment.

“A few pence—a few pence,” he moaned, half to himself.

“A few pence indeed—that’s the most ye’ll ever get together, me poor fella!”

Miss Doyle’s face softened as she thought of the long years of hardship, the self-imposed privations, which had enabled the old man to scrape together from the alms of the poor the paltry sum needed to save him from a pauper funeral.

“An’ he’d be hard-set to get that much,” she said to herself. “Are ye ready now?” she asked aloud.

“I’ll not keep ye wan minyit more, mum—miss, I mane; that’s the last. Now I have it tied up an’ ready.”

Without waiting for further permission Mary whisked round, and found Forty-Bags sitting in the midst of the débris of his property. Open bundles and gaping bags surrounded him on all sides; the ground was strewn with a chaotic assemblage of rags, old bones, potatoes, bits of glass and china, rusty nails and the like, while he hugged to his breast a small package carefully tied up in his cherished fragment of red waistcoat.

“Bless me soul!” exclaimed Mary, half-amused and half-indignant. “Ye’ll have to clear up all that rubbish,

me good man, afore ye go out of this—I wonder what in the name o' goodness," she added to herself, "that poor daft ould body is goin' to hide, if them's the treasures he carries about wid him?"

Crawling on his knees, Forty-Bags approached the hole, and with trembling hands bestowed his treasure therein; between them they replaced the earth, Forty-Bags working with his fingers, and Mary with her spade; the sod was once more set in position, and when well stamped down rendered the hiding-place almost undiscoverable. With a deep sigh Forty-Bags squatted back on his heels and gazed at it, and then looked up at Mary, his face full of piteous entreaty.

"It'll be as safe wid me," said she earnestly, "as if that green sod was the altar itself."

The solemnity of words and manner seemed to convince the other, and hurriedly rising and collecting his heterogeneous property—Mary stalking after him the while and pointing with her spade to any odd fragment he might have been disposed to overlook—he hung himself round at length in his accustomed manner, and took his departure, pausing only at the gate to invoke the blessing of Heaven upon her.

Mary followed him down the steps in silence, locked the gate and stood watching the odd-looking, slipshod figure till it disappeared; then shrugging her shoulders and remarking that it was a quare thing anyway, she betook herself indoors.

During the next few weeks he returned from time to time, being careful always to choose the dinner-hour; Mary regaled him on each occasion with a meal and

the permission to indulge in a good sleep in the proximity of his buried treasure.

She was beginning to take an odd kind of interest in the forlorn old waif who had thrown himself upon her mercy, and usually lingered a few minutes in his company, listening to his disjointed talk, and encouraging him when he seemed low-spirited, for, as he confided to her, he was “terrible lonesome” without the few little things he had carried about with him for so long. “They was as good as childer to me, miss,” he said once, with a queer smile.

When, towards autumn, a month passed without a call from Forty-Bags, Mary began to feel uneasy; she made surreptitious inquiries in the neighbourhood, but, though every one laughed at the sound of his name, no one appeared to have heard anything of him.

At last a pedlar brought news which sorely distressed her. He had unpacked his wares while Mary’s back was turned, and had placed his tray of brass trinkets on one of the laundry window-sills and the maids had hurried out to inspect them. Mary, overhearing the chatter and excitement, leaned out from the window above, and sternly commanded him to “clear off out of that”. Then, struck by a sudden thought, she withdrew her head and came downstairs.

“You do be thravellin’ the country a great deal, don’t ye?” she asked. “Did ye ever chance to come across ould Forty-Bags?”

The maids surreptitiously nudged each other, and one remarked in a loud whisper that Mary was getting anxious for news of her beau.

"Forty-Bags, is it?" said the pedlar. "Sure the old fellow is dead and buried this fortnight——"

"Ye don't say so?" cried Mary, turning quite pale, and falling back against the doorpost.

The girls gazed at her open-mouthed.

"Dead as a door-nail, ma'am," said the pedlar cheerfully. "Sure they found him lyin' by the roadside with his head hangin' over a ditch, the Lord ha' mercy on him!"

"Save us and bless us!" ejaculated Mary. "Who—who buried him?"

"Why, who do you think?" retorted the man facetiously. "Her Majesty the Queen, or maybe the Lord Liftinant. Who'd bury the likes o' him?"

"Don't tell me he was buried by the parish," cried Mary, throwing out her hand.

"Ah! Well, maybe he wasn't," returned the pedlar, with an elaborate wink. "Maybe he had a great, gran' funeral wid a hearse from Dublin and feathers to the horses' heads. Sure wasn't he a Lord and why wouldn't his Lordship be buried elegant?"

"I don't know how ye can have the heart to go makin' fun o' them that's dead and gone," said Mary, in a shaking voice. Then fixing angry eyes upon him: "I don't believe he's dead at all," she cried.

"Ye may plaise yourself about believin' it," retorted the other. "I've been readin' all about it in the *Leinster Express*, an' what's more I seen his funeral startin' off, and me leggin' it out from Roscreagh."

Mary stood dumbfounded, and the man continued with a laugh:—

“Wasn’t it countin’ the carriages I was, and admirin’ the horses”.

“Ah! don’t be goin’ on with your nonsense!” cried Miss Doyle indignantly. “Pack up all that rubbish now, and march off out o’ this. Get back to your work, girls, or I’ll walk yez straight off to the mistress. Mrs. Curly, I suppose it’s jew’ly you want to be buyin’ for that fine young son o’ yours?”

Nevertheless Mary remained anxious and ill at ease and walked two miles and more to the town that evening that she might procure some back numbers of the *Express*. After diligent searching she duly found a paragraph which set forth the discovery by some children, on their way to school, of the body of an old man, lying by the roadside. “Death had evidently taken place some hours previously,” said the paper, “and was probably painless, for the face presented a calm appearance. He proved to be a character well-known in the neighbourhood, popularly called ‘Forty-Bags,’ from the number of sacks which he was accustomed to carry. These on being examined contained nothing of value beyond a few potatoes, being filled with rags and rubbish of all descriptions; two or three pence only were secreted about his person, and he was duly buried by the Roscreagh Union.”

Mary hastened home, and, though it was almost dusk, provided herself with a spade, and at once proceeded to dig up Forty-Bags’ treasure.

Here was the bundle just where the poor old fellow had deposited it. It was very heavy, and when Mary opened it proved to contain coins. Not pennies—

even in the fading light she could see that—but silver: shillings, florins, half-crowns—why! there was actually a gold piece!—another—and another; and here in this pocket-book were notes—pound notes!

Sitting back on her heels Mary counted again and again, for she could not believe the evidence of her senses. Yet her calculations had ever the same result. Forty-Bags' savings amounted in all to nearly fifty pounds.

“And to think that the creature was buried by the workhouse,” groaned she. Her face worked and she burst into tears.

Mary's mistress was much exercised in her mind by a request from the laundress for permission to give a small party in the following week.

“A party, Mary?”

“Yes, ma'am,” said Mary, standing squarely before her with her hands folded at her waist, and an impenetrable expression of countenance. “I've been fifteen year in your service and I've never axed for lave to give so much as a cup o' tay before.”

“Well, that's true. Where do you want to give it?”

“Where, ma'am? Where else but in the laundry?” returned Mary, somewhat aggressively.

“For the servants?” hazarded the lady.

“Yes, ma'am, an' for a good few others too.”

“Well, we must have a limit, you know,” rejoined the other with rising indignation.

“I'm not axing ye for to pervide anything, ma'am,”

remarked Miss Doyle with dignity. “ ‘Tis my wish an’ my intition to pay for everything myself. I only want lave to have the people in the laundry—as manny as the place will hold,” she added defiantly.

“Dear me,” said her mistress, taken aback and yet oddly impressed by Mary’s solemn and determined manner. “I suppose—I wonder—Mary, I should like to know a little more about your views with regard to this party. What do you intend your friends to drink—tea?”

Mary uttered a short laugh. “They wouldn’t thank me for tay. I thought of orderin’ a small bar’l o’ porter, ma’am, if you’ve no objection.”

“Porter!” ejaculated the lady, “porter! Well only a small barrel, and nothing else of course.”

“I’ll have to give aiche of them a glass o’ sperrits,” announced Miss Doyle in a dispassionate tone. “Wan glass—they’ll look for that.”

“Not more than one, whatever happens, Mary,” said her mistress, after a dubious pause. “Remember that. I don’t think I ought to allow it at all.”

Mary remained gazing at her, immovably, and after a moment’s hesitation the lady gave a reluctant consent, weakly adding she felt quite sure she ought not to allow it.

“Still, as you’ve never asked for such a thing before, and are not likely to do such a thing again, I’ll allow it for once,” she concluded.

“I’m not likely to ask for it more nor wance,” said Mary loftily, as she withdrew.

Great was the excitement and curiosity in the vicinity

over Mary Doyle's party, particularly when it was known that instead of asking her more well-to-do neighbours, her invitations were chiefly sent to the quite poor folk, who dwelt in cabins. The upper servants at "The Coort" were so much offended at this state of affairs that they at first signified their intention of not being present, but finding that Mary seemed in no way affected by these threats they changed their minds, remarking to each other that it wouldn't do to be too hard on such a queer old body, and that anyhow it would be the greatest fun in the world to see what her jollification would be like.

The word hardly seemed to apply to the entertainment in question, for when at the appointed hour the guests arrived they found that the proceedings savoured rather of gloom than of rejoicing.

The ironing tables had, it is true, been brought down from the upper room, and groaned under a variety of eatables, solid joints sent in cold from the little "ho-tel" in the neighbouring country-town, roast fowls, pies and cakes; a barrel of porter was duly set forth at the upper end of the room flanked by an imposing array of bottles, but Mary herself mounted guard over these, Mary, habited all in black, her countenance wearing an expression of almost fierce melancholy. The last to arrive was the pedlar, whose appearance caused general surprise. As he entered Mary rose in her place and sternly commanded him to shut the door after him. Her eyes travelled slowly down the double line of faces all eagerly turned towards her.

"I dare say some o' yez is surprised at me givin' a

party,” said Mary severely, “but I haven’t axed ye here just for the fun o’ the thing, or to see yez make bastes o’ yourselves aitin’ an’ drinkin’. I sent for yez to come together in memory of an honest man that yez all knowed an’ oftentimes made sport of—a poor ould fella,” she continued, raising her voice, “that had a right to be treated respectful by every wan, but that was let go thrampin’ the roads by day an’ night till he dropped dead in a ditch.”

She broke off suddenly, wiping her eyes, and the company stared aghast, and the whispered query went round from one to another, Had the ould one gone out of her mind altogether or what in the world ailed her?

But Miss Doyle did not leave them long in doubt.

“Yez all knowed him,” she resumed, “an’ there’s no one here but had a good word for him. I’ll say that much for yez—I wouldn’t have axed anny one that hadn’t. So now I’ll tell yez the raison I called ye all together to-night—it’s to show respect to the memory o’ poor Forty-Bags.”

There was a general exclamation “Forty-Bags!”

“Aye,” said Mary, looking sternly round, “Forty-Bags! He was let die in a ditch and was buried by the parish—that was unbeknownst to meself or I wouldn’t have allowed it. But what I can do I will, an’ I’m goin’ to give him as good a wake as anny man could wish for.”

There was a pause of blank amazement and then a ripple of mirth coupled with admiration.

“More power to ye, Miss Doyle.” “Did annybody ever hear the like o’ that?” “Bedad, she’s doin’ well for the poor ould fella!”

Mary duly accepted the admiration and did her best to repress the mirth. In this she did not altogether succeed; the guests were determined to honour the departed in such a manner as they felt he would have wished.

Forty-Bags' wake was long remembered in the neighbourhood. As one of those present subsequently remarked, it was the grandest set-out that ever was known in these parts. The only thing that was wantin' was the corpse itself—but annyhow the poor ould fella 'ud be apt to rest aisier in his grave afther such a glorification.

Mary, however, was not satisfied. Though her hospitality had been conducted on a lavish scale there was still a considerable balance of the treasure remaining, and she was determined that it should be spent to the last penny on its former owner's behalf.

She would have dearly liked to carry out the funeral rites afresh to atone for the disgrace of the pauper burial; but ascertaining this to be impossible she ordered a tombstone of a size and elegance unsurpassed in the locality. She found, indeed, some slight difficulty in composing the inscription, as neither she nor any of those of whom she made inquiries could so much as form a guess at the old man's name.

The stone-mason, however, solved the difficulty.

"Why not give him a name, miss?" he suggested. "Pick out a name for yourself an' I'll cut it for ye. How would Sackville do now?" he added. "Sackville—that's near enough to Forty-Bags if ye come to think on it."

“Sackville,” said Mary dubiously. “Well—maybe so, but ye’ll have to put Forty-Bags underneath so that the people ‘ull know who I mane.”

So the prayers of the faithful were duly requested for the soul of John Sackville commonly called Forty-Bags, and Mary’s own soul was at peace within her.

The remainder of the old man’s hoard was disbursed by her in alms to such poor tramps as halted by her laundry door.

“Take this, honest man” (or woman as the case might be), she would say, pressing a coin into the beggar’s hand, “and mind ye put up a prayer for poor Forty-Bags—a poor creature the same as yerself without a roof to cover him.”

A reputation for tender benevolence was thus established by the old woman who had before been deemed so hard and cross-grained; and moreover a halo of romance gradually encircled her queer, awkward figure.

“It was thtrue for her,” folks reminded each other, “she often said ‘twas by her own ch’ice she didn’t get married, an’ at other times she’d say maybe she’d be takin’ every wan by surprise wan of these days. Maybe if the creature Forty-Bags had lived——”

Then they would say: “Well, God help her! it was the good-hearted woman she was anyway”.

Mary herself was not ill-pleased when a hint of this gossip reached her ears, though she refused to give any one satisfaction on the point, contenting herself as before with a dark shake of the head, and an emphatic “No matter”.

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“MISS SPENCER, sir.”

“Miss Spencer! I don’t know anything about Miss Spencer.”

Graham Denzil turned in his chair, his brows drawn together impatiently; Prout, his butler, stood by the door, calmly expectant.

“What does she want?” inquired Denzil, after a pause.

“I don’t know, sir. I told her I thought you was engaged, and she seemed very disappointed—very disappointed indeed, sir.”

“If you told her I was engaged what is she waiting for?”

“She said if you knew that she had come so far, and that the case was so urgent, perhaps you would see her, sir.”

“Well, let her come in,” said the philanthropist, after a moment’s frowning reflection. “I may as well see her and have done with it. Confound these charitable women,” he muttered to himself as the servant withdrew, “they always will insist on beginning at the wrong end. They cannot realise that it is waste of time to come to me about individual cases. But I don’t suppose I shall ever make this good creature understand.”

He turned sharply towards the door as it was thrown

[REDACTED]

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open for the second time—a formidable-looking man, and one whom it would take some courage to attack on a trifling matter.

At forty-five Denzil had come to be recognised as a social power; but though he devoted energies, wealth and time exclusively to the amelioration of a certain section of the human race, he was no milk-and-water philanthropist, easily moved, or imposed on with impunity.

The lines of his strong dark face were harsh enough as the newcomer advanced; he glanced at her keenly.

A little person—a very little person—came forward with faltering steps, and, instead of taking possession of the chair towards which Denzil, rising with a formal bow, had motioned her, walked right up to his table, and extended a small shaking hand, fixing him the while with her large terrified eyes. The girl—indeed she looked scarcely more than a child—was evidently dizzy with fright; her pretty face was pale, her breath came in gasps, and she essayed in vain to speak.

Denzil insensibly relaxed as he shook the hand so unexpectedly stretched out to him; then he pointed to the chair a second time, and said very kindly:—

“ Sit down, and tell me what I can do for you ”.

She backed to the chair and sat down, still keeping her eyes on his face. Denzil reseated himself and pretended to be busy with his papers for a moment or two, in order to give her time to regain her self-possession; then he turned to her and said gently:—

“ How can I help you ? ”

“ I want an appointment,” blurted out the little creature abruptly.

Graham smiled.

"That is rather vague, isn't it? What kind of appointment?"

"Perhaps I ought to say situation," said Miss Spencer meekly.

She looked about eighteen, and had a round soft baby face, with big hazel eyes. Her hair, nut-brown in colour, appeared to curl naturally; she was neatly, even prettily, clad in deep mourning. The material of her dress, however, was too light for the season, and the little boot which protruded from beneath her skirt was very, very muddy.

The dawning impatience of which Denzil had been conscious as she revealed her business died away at sight of the little muddy boot.

"Governess, I suppose?" he inquired, with a certain compassion.

"I don't mind at all," returned the girl, regaining courage all at once, and speaking fluently and confidentially. "Governess, or companion, or secretary, or amanuensis."

Denzil smiled again.

"I wonder," he said, looking at her with an unwonted twinkle in his eye; "I wonder what is the difference between a secretary and an amanuensis? Do you know, I am afraid you have come to the wrong person. My work lies in quite a different direction. If I should hear of an opening for you in any of the capacities you mention, I shall bear you in mind; but meanwhile hadn't you better try an agency?"

"I have tried several agencies," returned Miss

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Spencer, with a trembling lip, "but they all want money down."

"And there is not much of that going, I suppose?" hinted the philanthropist.

"I have hardly any left," faltered the little creature, opening her eyes very wide, and looking unconsciously piteous.

"Friends in London?" queried Denzil.

"No; I don't know anybody except Mr.——" naming a certain clergyman. "Mr. Morpeth gave me a letter of introduction to him, but he said he didn't think he could help me."

"And who is Mr. Morpeth?"

"Oh, he is our vicar down at Pengwynnock. He is almost the only friend I have in the world; it was he who told me to come to you."

"Indeed!" said Denzil somewhat dryly. "I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance, and don't quite know why he should have selected me for this honour."

He was beginning to feel irritated again; the girl sat there as though she intended to remain all the morning. He saw no possibility of helping her, yet both she and her reverend adviser appeared to think she might justly claim his assistance.

"He said—he said," pursued Miss Spencer in somewhat tremulous tones, "that he knew you by name as one associated with good works, and that if I—if I found myself in straits I was to go to you, and to tell you from an old man—meaning himself—that sometimes prevention is better than cure. I'm sure I don't know what he meant by that," she added.

Denzil leaned suddenly forward, gazing at her keenly, and she looked back at him with her big child's eyes. She had evidently spoken the truth. She knew nothing of the old man's meaning ; but Denzil knew, and after a moment he threw himself back in his chair again and considered.

The old clergyman of this remote Cornish parish had touched the right chord. By those few words he had put forward his *protégée's* claim for protection and help in a manner not to be disregarded. Graham Denzil spent his life in endeavouring to succour distressed womanhood—womanhood of a very different type. It was his custom, moreover, to dispense charity to masses, not individuals ; but he now felt himself unaccountably interested in this unit, belonging though she did to a class with which he had hitherto had no dealings. How many girls came to London with just the same equipment as this one—a pretty face, an empty pocket, groundless confidence, absolute ignorance of the world. Poor little helpless straws, by what fierce winds were they caught up, on what dark tides did they drift away ! If it was his duty to rescue, was not the duty more paramount when it was possible to preserve ?

"Why did you come to London, child ?" he asked abruptly.

"I had to do something," said Miss Spencer. "Poor mama was ill for such a long time, and when she died there were only a few pounds left, and so I thought it was much better to be on the spot—there was no opening for me at Pengwynncock, and I was tired



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of advertising. Mr. Morpeth didn't want me to go away, but I—well, I didn't know what else to do."

"You have come to the wrong person, as I told you; but I will see what I can do. Now, let us hear what are your qualifications. I suppose you have been well educated?"

"Oh, yes; I went to a very good school. Miss Winterberry's school, you know—"

"I suppose you are up in all the 'ologies," he remarked, as she paused.

"Well, I was first in geology," she cried, with sparkling eyes; "and I learnt the Greek roots."

"Very practical, indeed," said Denzil. "What about French?"

"Grammatical French," she said, "not conversational."

"People rather expect conversational French now, I'm afraid; so many French girls come over."

"Ah, but French girls are not reliable," said Miss Spencer, looking extremely wise. "Miss Winterberry said she would not have a French girl about the place for the world."

"Some people have a foolish prejudice in favour of learning French from a native on account of the accent," murmured Denzil.

"I wonder what your accent is like."

"Miss Winterberry said I had a very good accent," returned the girl, in rather a wounded tone.

"Doubtless. German? No German? Music?"

"I am not a performer," announced Miss Spencer

in a perfectly satisfied tone, which seemed to imply that she considered the fact rather advantageous than otherwise.

"H'm. Well, now with regard to a possible secretaryship; do you know anything of shorthand?"

"I could soon learn."

"Yes, like the man who was asked if he could play the violin. Can you use a typewriter?"

"I never had anything to do with such things," she responded, with dignity. "I never thought I should have to earn my living."

"I dare say you didn't, poor little soul!" cried he; then, with a kind of outburst of wondering wrath: "But what was everybody thinking about—what did they suppose was to become of you?"

"Papa was manager of the bank," returned the girl; "nobody ever thought he was going to die."

"Of course not. But people do occasionally die, don't they? And when a man makes no provision for his family the widow is likely to suffer; and when the principal on which she has been living is all gone, the orphan is thrown upon the world."

He got up and began to pace about the room impatiently. And this was but a poor unit—one of many—one of many!

Miss Spencer, resenting this digression from the subject under discussion, and being, moreover, disposed to think his strictures unwarrantable, brought him back to the point by announcing, with an offended air, "I write a very good hand".

"Come, that's something," cried he, wheeling round.



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"Let me see a sample of it. Write your name and address on that sheet of paper."

She pulled off her glove, revealing a chubby baby hand, rather red, as, in the opinion of Anatole France, it behoves the hands of young girls to be, and with a chilblain on the little finger.

She wrote her name—"Miss Lucy Spencer"—in a firm, bold, clear hand, of the type exemplified in "Civil Service" copybooks. The address indicated a locality quite respectable, as Denzil noted with satisfaction, but also inconveniently remote. He remembered the muddy boots, and wondered if she had trudged all the way.

"Now I am going to give you a piece of advice," he said seriously. "Go back to Pengwynnock, at least for the present, until some employment is found for you. I will do the best I can; I will speak to two or three people who may perhaps be able to help you. But meanwhile it is perfectly insane for a child like you to be living alone in London—"

"I couldn't possibly go back," interrupted Lucy hotly. "Something is sure to turn up if I remain on the spot, but if I go away—and the journey is so expensive, too! It would take nearly all my money," she added, with a sudden change from wrath to piteousness.

"I will find the money," said Denzil kindly; "as a loan, I mean, of course," he added, seeing the girl flush to the roots of her hair.

"I couldn't possibly accept it," she returned quickly. "I have never borrowed money in my life; and I am

certainly not going to begin by borrowing money from a stranger and a gentleman. Mama always told me that it was only very low sort of girls who put themselves under obligations to gentlemen."

She held her head high, and spoke with so ridiculous an air of worldly wisdom that Graham did not know whether to be more amused or irritated.

"I see you have been taught how to take care of yourself," he remarked ironically.

"Of course, I have to, now that I am obliged to make my own way in the world."

"Quite right. Better be on your guard; it is not always easy to distinguish friends from foes. Now, as I am a very busy man, Miss Spencer, I am afraid I can't spare any more time. I will make a note of your address and bear your case in mind. If nothing *should* turn up, and you find yourself in any unpleasant predicament, you had better come to me again."

He spoke with a final air, walking towards the door as though to open it for her. Lucy felt herself dismissed, and rose, looking somewhat crestfallen. Her eyes wandered round the room, taking note of the books, the piles of paper, the open tin cases full of documents. A sudden inspiration came to her. "I suppose *you* don't want a secretary?" she said.

Now it was part of Graham Denzil's scheme of life to perform most of his work with his own hand. When the press of business was very great he did occasionally call in the aid of a shorthand writer; but he had never employed any permanent amanuensis. He paused for a moment, gazing compassionately at the

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forlorn little figure; and then the message of the old Cornish parson recurred to him—Prevention is better than cure. Why not give the girl a chance—test her capabilities for a few weeks until something more practicable might, as she expressed it, turn up?

He made the suggestion in a few words; the manner in which she received his communication filling him with the same sense of mingled irritation and amusement as that of which he had before been conscious.

The meek little suppliant disappeared; it was now evidently Lucy's object to appear, above all things, practical—quite a woman of business, in fact.

Yes, she would be very glad to undertake the appointment, even though it was but a temporary one. When was she to enter on her duties? The terms—oh, yes, the terms were quite satisfactory. (Graham had, in fact, after a rapid mental calculation, named a sum which, as he reckoned, would amply suffice for her actual needs.)

The mite of a hand was again extended with a complacent air, and the little creature turned in the doorway to remark: "I am sure we shall get on very well".

"I hope we shall," said Denzil; and then he closed the door, and went back to his writing-table, and laughed—but somewhat ruefully.

On the next day, at eleven o'clock, the new secretary arrived. She was, as before, pale with nervousness, and the hand which she extended was icy cold.

"Don't be frightened," said Denzil encouragingly; "your duties will not be very arduous."

But Miss Spencer declared—albeit in quavering tones—that she was not in the least frightened, and was quite ready for her work; whereupon Graham did for a moment look really alarming.

Perhaps he felt that if she wasn't nervous she ought to be. He, on his part, was making a very great effort.

"Here are six notes," he said rather dryly, as he pushed a little pile of papers towards her. "In answering the first three you will say, in each case, that I regret being unable to comply with the writer's request. In two of the others—but perhaps you had better dispose of these three first. You will find writing materials there."

Another table had been set forth, facing his own, and Miss Lucy Spencer took her seat, with a somewhat lugubrious air. She opened first one note and then another, frowned, meditated, looked appealingly towards her employer, but, receiving no response from that quarter, devoted herself with a sigh to her task. Denzil, feigning unconsciousness of these proceedings, continued to read the document with which he had been engaged when she entered.

Presently—"I've done these," came in a small voice from the other side of the room.

"You have been very quick. Bring them to me."

Elated at his commendation she crossed the room with an airy tread, and spread out the notes before him. On all three the same legend was set forth: "Mr. Denzil regrets that he cannot comply with the writer's request".



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"I'm afraid that won't do," said he, suppressing a smile. "You don't give the name of the person you are writing to; and you must contrive to put it a little more civilly than that."

"But you didn't tell me to say the names," protested she; "and how am I to put it more civilly?"

Tears were evidently not far off; his heart smote him.

"I think you had better write some letters from dictation first," he said; "then you will get into the way of it. You have been accustomed to write from dictation?"

"Oh, yes," Lucy said, she had often written from dictation at school.

She wrote very quickly, and everything went quite smoothly until, at the end of half an hour or so, Denzil inspected the result of her labours.

"My dear child!" he exclaimed involuntarily; and then came what seemed to Lucy a fearful pause. "How do you spell vicinity?" he went on.

"Aren't there two s's?" queried Lucy tremulously.

"And here, again, 'moreover,' 'advisable'. And what about the punctuation? You've run all the sentences into each other."

"You didn't tell me the stops," returned Lucy tearfully. "Miss Winterberry always gave out the stops."

She had turned as white as a sheet once more, and her eyes seemed ready to start from her head.

"Well, it's no great matter, after all," said Denzil soothingly. "I dare say it was as much my fault as yours. You see I am new to this business, too. I'll

announce the stops in future, and when you come to any alarming big word you had better ask me how to spell it."

Miss Spencer trotted back meekly to her desk, and Denzil, walking up and down the room, recommenced his dictation. He was beginning to feel quite satisfied with this new mode of procedure, when a question from Lucy suddenly disconcerted him.

"How do you spell 'italicise'?" she inquired.

"Italicise?" he echoed, gazing at her blankly.

"Yes; you said 'Italicise this'."

"But you don't mean to say you've been writing
— Just let me see that note, Miss Spencer."

Up got Lucy, with a mystified face, but nevertheless with a certain air of conscious rectitude.

Denzil burst into a fit of laughter as she placed the document in his hands.

"You really must excuse me," he said, endeavouring to regain his gravity; "it is too comical. I never could have imagined—"

"But what is wrong?" gasped the girl.

"I'll explain. You see this sentence here? '*Do you consider this course advisable query?*' And here again: '*The "Times" of June 22 justly observes quotation marks*'. And now: '*The great crux italis*'—you hadn't got any farther, on account of the spelling difficulty."

He laughed again; and then, seeing that she was crimson with mortification, and apparently quite at sea as to the nature of her error, he became serious, and entered into a minute and painstaking explanation.

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"Did you not yourself ask me to dictate the stops?" he said, in conclusion, noticing that she seemed more aggrieved than penitent.

"You do it quite differently to Miss Winterberry," she said. "Of course, if you gave them out like Miss Winterberry——"

"Well, I am willing to take an indirect lesson from Miss Winterberry," returned he, drawing the disputed note towards him and scribbling upon it. "What do you call that, for instance?"

"Miss Winterberry always said 'Question mark'."

"And these?"

"Miss Winterberry never said anything but 'Inverted commas'."

"I see; I was wrong in dubbing them 'Quotation marks'. And now, when I wish to emphasise a word —like this—how am I to let you know my meaning?"

"You must say 'Underline,'" announced Lucy, with a superior air.

"I'll bear it in mind. Well, I think we have worked enough for to-day; to-morrow, no doubt, everything will go well. Now you had better go home—take the 'bus; there is no need for you to tire yourself to death. I hope soon to hear of something that may suit you. Meanwhile, remember all the good advice that any one has ever given you. Be very prudent, don't make friends with strangers, don't go out after dark."

Lucy was very much offended at what she evidently considered superfluous counsel, and endeavoured to show it by the stateliness with which she said "Good-bye,"

and walked across the room ; but, as Denzil was occupied in tearing up and consigning to the waste-paper basket her epistolary efforts of the morning, it is possible that her attitude escaped him.

After many abortive attempts, much forbearance and goodwill on Denzil's part, and somewhat fitful zeal on Lucy's, the pair got into the way of working tolerably well together.

Graham, keeping a wary eye fixed upon the little scribe and noting when she seemed to falter, immediately spelt the word which might be supposed to puzzle her ; he also indicated the punctuation, after the manner prescribed by Miss Winterberry, and in a tone so absolutely unlike that which he employed for the mere wording of his sentences, that there could be no possibility of Miss Spencer's making mistakes. Thus a full stop was enunciated in the deepest bass, while "inverted commas" were jerked out in an imperative falsetto.

Now and then, nevertheless, a difference of opinion rose between them. When Lucy, for instance, adorned the page with a number of neat but quite unnecessary commas, her plea that she considered it advisable to introduce one after every six or seven words appeared to him unsatisfactory. Again, that spelling question was one which caused much friction ; Miss Spencer's assurances that no fault had hitherto been found with her orthography quite failing to convince Graham.

On one occasion, indeed, he lost patience. "*Loose no time,*" he ejaculated. "Cannot you even manage to spell a word of four letters ?"



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Miss Spencer looked up in astonishment.

"Do you not know that there are not two o's in *lose*? You have written *lose*."

"I thought there were two s's in *lose*," returned she, with dignity.

"There are not two s's in *lose* any more than there are in *goose*," retorted Denzil, adding, with a good-humoured laugh, as he met her surprised gaze, "But sometimes a little goose may have two very big i's. That was a joke," he remarked, after a pause, during which Lucy had stared at him in utter bewilderment —"I am alluding to *your* eyes."

Lucy walked back to her chair in silence, took another sheet of paper, and wrote the note over again. She was evidently much affronted, though whether by the jest itself or by the reprimand which had preceded it, Denzil could not discover.

"Has it ever occurred to you," he inquired presently, in a graver tone, "that you might try to use your brains a little?"

"I never knew I was so stupid," replied Lucy, with sulky stateliness.

"Not exactly stupid," he returned coolly, "but sometimes extremely silly, and very often careless. When, for instance, I have told you a thing, not once but several times, how is it that you can never remember it?"

"I suppose," answered Miss Spencer, in an aggrieved tone, "I suppose because I don't think."

"Precisely; but isn't it about time you should begin to think? Has it ever occurred to you that you might

try to improve yourself? Education is seldom complete at eighteen, and yours has certainly been defective. Still, after all, you *have* got brains; you couldn't have been first in—what was it? Geology? —if you hadn't brains. Miss Winterberry was probably too much occupied in teaching you geology to pay attention to spelling; but I assure you good spelling *is* desirable—particularly in a secretary. I will give you a book which will help you, I fancy. It deals with orthography, punctuation, and all such matters; the rules are set forth very clearly, and altogether it should be of great use to you."

"Thank you," said Lucy distantly. "If you will give me the name of the book I will buy it for myself."

His lip tightened for a moment, but he made no remark. He wrote out the title of the book in question and gave it to her; and work proceeded for the rest of the morning without any conversation except what was absolutely necessary.

It was evident that Miss Spencer considered herself ill-used. She had, in fact, received Denzil's little lecture in precisely the same spirit as that in which, no doubt, she had unwillingly hearkened to Miss Winterberry's scoldings in days gone by. To mark her displeasure further she did not shake hands with him on leaving, but passed him with a regal bow.

"Perverse little simpleton!" he ejaculated, as the door closed behind her; and then he wondered to himself why he did not wash his hands of her. He did not in the least require her services; in fact she wasted



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a great deal of his time and gave him an infinity of trouble. The labour which it cost him, when communicating with his correspondents through her—so to convey his meaning that the recipient of the letter should understand, while she herself, poor little innocent, should remain in happy ignorance—was in itself considerable. She was, of course, unconscious of this. Nevertheless, it seemed curious that she should have no perception of his forbearance and generosity. In what evil part she had taken his harmless little joke; and yet it had been a very good joke. Denzil dwelt on it with the complacency which a really clever man sometimes bestows on a jest which would make a person of average intellect blush.

“Two very big i’s!” Would it have been better, he wondered, if he had said “capital i’s?” And then he began to think of the eyes in question, and of the baby face, and the chubby hand so resolutely withheld from him to-day. After all, poor babe, he must not be too hard.

Next morning, however, when Miss Spencer arrived, still in a state of dudgeon, his sense of exasperation returned. Miss Spencer’s lapses were, in consequence, corrected with dry brevity; her wandering attention was recalled from time to time with a certain asperity, and the culminating point was reached when, on reading aloud at Denzil’s request a letter which she had just written, she allowed herself to fall into an error of pronunciation which had already been frequently pointed out to her.

“How often must I tell you that ‘safety’ is not a

trisyllable? I must beg you to be more careful. This will really never do."

Thereupon Lucy threw down her pen and jumped up.

"Indeed it won't do!" she cried passionately; "I can see that for myself. Nothing is right. You are always finding fault with me. I can't stand it any more!"

She had picked up her gloves, and now, buttoning her jacket with trembling fingers, made for the door.

"Come back, Miss Spencer!" said Denzil. He did not raise his voice, but something in its tone arrested her. As she turned slowly she saw an expression in his face which had never been there before.

"Come back," he repeated; and then, as she came stumbling forward, "Sit down".

She sat down, very suddenly, and immediately hung out her little white signal of distress. But Denzil was not to be mollified; she deserved a lesson, and this time she should have it.

"I don't think you quite understand the position of affairs," he said; and in a few incisive words proceeded to lay it before her. She was weeping when he had finished, but he made no attempt to soften the severity of his reprimand.

"Since I am so—so ignorant, and so—so worthless," she sobbed, finding voice at length, "I wonder you engaged me as your secretary."

"I wonder why I did," said he; and all at once his face relaxed. "What do you think?" he went on, in a tone now no longer stern, but friendly and colloquial; "what can have induced me to do it, do you suppose?"



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Self-interest, perhaps? I may have thought it possible to turn your inexperience to my own profit?"

She was looking at him very hard, the great tears hanging on her eyelashes.

"No, I don't think that," she said, after a long pause "I think—I think you did it out of kindness."

"Do you, indeed?" said he; and then he smiled, and Lucy gave a little gasp, and wiped her eyes.

"As a matter of fact," he went on, "I do feel kindly towards you, and I honestly wish for your good; I am glad that you realise it. Now, this being the case, don't you think you might try a little harder to please me? When your father was alive I dare say you often tried to please him. Well, I am old enough to be your father—"

"You don't look it," she interpolated, with a watery smile.

Her intention was evidently to convey a graceful tribute, and possibly to heap coals of fire upon his head. Graham bowed gravely, though he with difficulty restrained the exclamation which rose to his lips: "Oh, you impossible little being!"

He was, however, genuinely touched when, a moment or two later, she declared, looking earnestly in his face:—

"I will really try to please you—I should like to please you".

His satisfaction at this promising attitude was, however, somewhat checked when, on the following day, Lucy arrived with a severe cold, and, on being questioned as to its cause, owned that it was probably due

to the fact of her having sat up till one o'clock on the previous night "studying".

"What, the spelling-book?" inquired Denzil.

"Yes," returned she in husky but triumphant tones; "I worked seven hours yesterday."

"And you were so much absorbed, I suppose," suggested he, "that you allowed the fire to go out?"

"Oh, I don't have any fire," explained Lucy, still triumphantly. "I have to be very economical, you see—"

"But surely," said Denzil, "you could afford yourself a fire. I intended your salary—"

"Oh, but I am saving up for a rainy day," she returned, with a bright little nod. She was evidently much pleased that he should realise her foresight and common sense. Graham, with a kind of painstaking exasperation, endeavoured to make clear to her, first, that such economies were mistaken, her health being of paramount importance; secondly, that her zeal in the matter of the spelling-book was a little intemperate, and would probably lead to results less satisfactory than she anticipated.

Lucy, though evidently unconvinced, was submissive. She agreed to confine her orthographical labours to two hours daily, and capitulated as regarded the fire to a certain extent.

"While my cold lasts," she conceded; and with that Denzil was forced to be content.

She did honestly try very hard during the succeeding weeks; she was so extremely attentive to the smallest syllable that fell from his lips that her intent gaze

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made Denzil quite nervous whenever he paused for a word ; she learned a variety of orthographical rules by heart, and if the wrong one was occasionally brought into play, Graham was not cruel enough to lay stress upon it.

Nevertheless, he noticed with concern that she was growing thin and pale ; and, one morning, observing the particularly pinched appearance of her little face, he startled her by inquiring abruptly :—

“ What did you have for breakfast, Miss Spencer ? ”

“ Two biscuits and a banana,” responded Miss Spencer promptly.

“ Was that—excuse my seeming curiosity ; it is not meant impertinently—was that from economy or choice ? ”

“ Well, of course I like to be thrifty,” returned Lucy, summoning up her most sensible air ; “ but, as a matter of fact, I haven’t much appetite lately, and I thought I could eat that better than tea and bread-and-butter.”

“ Have you left off having fires ? ” he inquired, after a pause.

“ Oh, yes ; I don’t want a fire now. I am quite well. A fire wouldn’t give me an appetite,” she added, with a sage look.

Denzil groaned inwardly. What was to be done with this child ? She was no more fit to look after herself than a two-year-old baby. She would be ill upon his hands next. He had a momentary inclination to raise her salary, but refrained ; on some points she was extremely sensitive, and would have at once guessed that the unmerited increase of pay was, in other words, an act of charity.

In spite of her most valiant efforts it became more and more evident that the secretaryship was a farce ; and Denzil tried his best to find more suitable employment for her, but with signal ill-success. It might have been that, in spite of his assurances of Miss Spencer's unblemished respectability, people were rather afraid of engaging a *protégée* of his, or it might have been owing to the fact that there was really so little to go upon. She was a nice girl, young and bright, and that was about all. No experience, no references, extremely few accomplishments, and those far from perfect of their kind. It was scarcely any wonder that his friends shrugged their shoulders and advised him to send her back to Cornwall. He had begun to think that he should be obliged to make an effort in this direction (shrinking though he did from inflicting such a blow on the little creature, who had, in spite of a hundred weaknesses—or perhaps on account of them—managed to endear herself to him after a fashion) when an incident occurred which threw an unexpected light on Miss Spencer's circumstances.

One morning she approached him with an air of subdued excitement and mystery, and asked if he could possibly dispense with her services on the following day.

"It's something rather particular," she added. "Somebody's coming by train. I am to meet him at eleven. He's my cousin—I mean," correcting herself with an evident twinge of conscience—"a sort of cousin—a connection."

"One, I dare say, who aspires to be rather a near con-



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nection," suggested Denzil, with a smile. "In other words, you are engaged to him, Miss Spencer?"

Lucy flushed very prettily, and smiled and dimpled, and said, Yes; she and Robert had been engaged for a very long time—nearly thirteen months.

"I am delighted to hear it!" exclaimed Denzil heartily. "But why—don't be angry with me for asking—why don't you marry Mr. Robert?"

"Mr. Burton," corrected Lucy. "Well, you see, though he has a very good appointment, he thinks it would not be quite prudent to marry yet. He is getting seventy pounds a year, but he says we ought to wait till he is earning a good deal more than that. But lots of people do marry who haven't much more," she added, rather wistfully.

"I suppose they do," agreed Denzil.

He was pondering deeply, but felt at the same time an immense sense of relief.

"What is Mr. Burton's profession?" he asked.

"He's assistant master in a boys' school. He's very clever—*dreadfully* clever; he got two scholarships, and he was at Oxford."

"Come," cried Denzil delightedly, "this sounds very promising. I should like to see Mr. Burton. Let me see—at three o'clock to-morrow, after you and he have had time to say a good deal to each other, and after he has lunched and rested, and all that kind of thing, he might call upon me. Will you ask him to do this—will you tell him I shall expect him at three o'clock?"

Lucy, full of delight and importance, readily agreed, accepting Mr. Denzil's intimation as one more proof of

the interest he took in her. Her attention wandered several times during the course of the morning, but Denzil felt no irritation; his spirits had gone up with a bound.

At the appointed hour on the following day Mr. Burton made his appearance; a tall young man, somewhat solemn as to manner, somewhat shabby as to dress, a little uncertain with regard to the disposal of his arms and legs, and with a good, clever, honest face.

Denzil surveyed him with satisfaction, but did not at once speak.

"I understood you wished to see me," remarked the visitor, after a pause.

"Yes, I want to see you very particularly; I have something to say to you."

Denzil paused, and then said, leaning forward with a smile: "I think you would suit me very well as secretary. Will you accept the post?"

Robert Burton stared at him.

"I have never thought of undertaking any such position," he faltered. "Besides, I understood that my cousin——"

"Your cousin doesn't quite suit me," said Denzil. He stopped abruptly, finding it a little difficult to explain to the lover the various reasons why Miss Spencer was not quite satisfactory.

Burton's face fell. "She told me she was getting on so well," he murmured.

"The fact is, I would rather have to do with a man," resumed Denzil. "The work on which I am chiefly



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engaged is not such as a young girl should be associated with."

Robert said he realised that ; but that, nevertheless, even if Miss Spencer was dispensed with, he himself did not feel inclined to fill her vacant place. He had, in fact, already chosen his career, and intended to adhere to it. Promotion was slow, yet he could not but feel he was more likely to be successful in a walk of life for which he had been trained than if he were to relinquish it for duties to which he was unaccustomed.

" The salary would be a hundred and fifty pounds a year," said Graham persuasively. " I would guarantee a hundred and fifty pounds a year ; I would undertake to retain you in my employment until you find another engagement equally remunerative and perhaps more congenial to yourself."

Robert stared more than ever, asking himself if his interlocutor had taken leave of his senses.

" I have a special reason for this proposal," went on Denzil. " I want—well, to be quite plain—I want you to marry your cousin at once."

Robert rose to his feet, flushing hotly.

" That is a matter," he said stammeringly, " a—a very private matter—I don't think I could submit to any interference on such a point."

Denzil rose, too, and clapped him on the shoulder.

" Now look here, my good chap," he said ; " you had better listen to me. I haven't the least wish to be meddlesome—but I think you would make a very good secretary, and I'm quite certain that you ought to marry Miss Spencer without loss of time. Are

you aware, my dear fellow," he went on, "that that child is living in an attic, chiefly on—on bananas? That she doesn't have a fire, because she wants to be economical; that she nearly dies of fright before she crosses a street? I watched her from my window, and observed that she generally stopped short almost under the horses' feet; that she—well, think of what she is, and ask yourself if she is fit to be alone in London?"

Robert turned pale, and looked extremely serious. Denzil respected the struggle which was evidently going on in his mind.

"I can only see this way out of the difficulty," he went on. "I have tried to find employment for her. I even thought that her engagement here, temporary though it is, might be a useful training for her, but—"

"I'm sorry you have found her so unsatisfactory," said the young man in a wounded tone.

Denzil took a turn about the room, paused, laughed, and finally said, with a humorous look: "Well, you know—as a matter of fact, she can't spell!"

"I know she can't," said the lover; and he, too, laughed somewhat ruefully, but with so kindly and tender a look in his eyes that Denzil's heart went out to him.

"You may trust me, Mr. Burton," he said earnestly. "I am not at all a Quixotic person, but I take a very great interest in Miss Spencer; and, honestly, I don't know what else is to be done. Now, I rather fancy that were it not for certain honourable scruples you

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would have no objection to marrying her out of hand."

"No objection at all," said Robert, with a smile quite as tender as the former one, and not in the least rueful. "Quite the contrary. I—it seems like a dream."

Denzil looked at him half sadly.

Yes, no wonder the good fellow found it hard to realise that the beloved little bride, whom he hoped to make his own only after years of labour, was actually thrust into his arms. Denzil extended his hand frankly :—

"Come," he said, "I have told you that you may trust me. Don't be afraid that the obligation will be too great. You have plenty of ability, and I shall make you very useful to me. In fact," he went on, "you will confer as great a benefit as you receive."

"I cannot admit that," said Robert; but he put his hand fearlessly into the philanthropist's. "I—I don't know how to thank you!"

Denzil shook his hand warmly, and looked at him with genuine satisfaction. Not one man in a thousand, he said to himself, could reconcile gratitude with self-respect. This man had sufficient greatness of soul not only to accept a benefit but not to be ashamed of accepting it.

A few minutes later Robert went his way, walking upon air, in a state of rapture only equalled by his bewilderment; and Graham Denzil was left alone to congratulate himself on the success of his enterprise.

All his life long he had been considered an emi-

nently wise and judicious person, one whose dealings with his fellow-creatures, humane and generous though they might be, were nevertheless dictated by sound practical common sense. Yet to-day he had done what the world would call an extremely foolish thing ; he had set his customary rules of conduct at defiance, and become for the nonce undeniably Quixotic. He had taken a perfectly unknown young man out of the sphere in which he was contented and useful, and had thrown upon him responsibilities for which he might or might not be adapted ; he had brought about what could not but be termed an improvident marriage, and had pledged himself to act thenceforth the part of Providence to these two young creatures. And yet, as he meditated on his enormities, he chuckled. He was untroubled by any qualms of conscience ; entirely unabashed. Not all the wise and important undertakings in which he had hitherto been engaged gave him so much satisfaction as the mental contemplation of the bliss of these two unimportant units.

Nevertheless, when his eyes fell upon the writing-table at which Lucy generally sat, the chair with the hassock in front of it, because those ridiculous little feet of hers were such a long way from the ground ; the blotting-paper, ornamented with various scrawls by means of which his late secretary had made trial trips, as it were, when any particularly difficult word was in question ; the pen handle nibbled at the end, he heaved a little sigh.

"After all," he said, "I believe I shall miss her!"



MADEMOISELLE AND FRAÜLEIN.

WHEN Mademoiselle first arrived at Greathaven the season was at its height, and pupils were not lacking ; but when the winter came, with the exception of a single class, employment had she none. The gloomy waves rolled in upon an almost deserted strand, hotels were practically empty, boarding-houses shut up ; only the regular inhabitants of the place remained. Yet, though she had originally intended to migrate to London with many other birds of passage at the end of the summer, though many dreary months would have to be lived through before she could hope to obtain fresh engagements, Mademoiselle remained a fixture in her tiny attic room, for since coming to Greathaven she had found a friend.

Not an influential one, not even an attractive personality—just a little German Fräulein, middle-aged like herself, poor like herself, lonely like herself. In this loneliness perhaps lay the secret of the affection which had suddenly sprung up between them ; the two little solitary souls had drifted together, touched, and become united.

It all began on 2nd November (*Le Jour des Morts*). Fräulein, who was resident teacher at the school where Mademoiselle had her daily class, encountered the

Frenchwoman in the passage, and observed that her eyes were red. Immediately her thoughts flew to the hillside churchyard amid the yellowing woods in the far Fatherland where it had ever been her custom to carry on this day a wreath of immortelles, inscribed "To my innermost heart's beloved father"; and tears rushed to her own kind blue eyes.

"*Ach!*" she said, and clasped the other by the hand, "you, too, perhaps, have lost a father?"

"I have lost both—my father and my mother," said Mademoiselle.

"Your mother, too! *Ach!* you poor one!" exclaimed Fräulein. "Aber, you are more unfortunate than I. But my father—my above all dearest father!"

Mademoiselle wrung the little bony hand she held, and at the sympathetic pressure Fräulein sobbed, and then, because they were so lonely and so sorry for each other, and because there was no one else who understood in the least what they both were feeling, they fell into each other's arms and vowed friendship. And after that day, though life was just as hard, and the world was just as cold, and they both remained as poor as ever, each had a little warm bright place in her heart wherein the other was installed.

One bitterly cold day Fräulein, breathless after her climb up many flights of stairs, burst into Mademoiselle's lodging. It was her custom to spend a couple of hours with her friend every evening during her own spare time. She found Mademoiselle sitting by the table huddled up in a variety of wraps, and embracing with either arm a large beer bottle.

"Jemini! what art thou doing there?" she inquired. "Is that beer in those bottles that thou art hugging so fondly?"

Mademoiselle's sallow cheek took a deeper tinge.

"But no, but no," she cried. "Beer! I would not touch it for the world."

"Not lager beer?" interrupted Fräulein incredulously. "Ah, my dear, lager beer is not to be spoken of in that tone. There are people who prefer Pilsener, but—"

"But I am not one of them," put in Mademoiselle, with a laugh. "No, no, give me a good little Piquet. But it is not that either which I have here in these bottles. It is quite simply hot water. I try to warm myself, my dear—without, all the same, very much success."

With a laugh and a shrug she sent a third bottle rolling over the bare boards from beneath her feet, where it had hitherto lain concealed.

"The worst of it is," she added, still laughing rather dolefully, "I can never manage to get them all hot together. I boil the water in my spirit-lamp, and it is so small that by the time the second bottle is hot the first is cold. I have one side frozen, just as the other is getting comfortably warm."

Fräulein glanced at the grate, of which a summer decoration of cut paper, now very limp and grey, was the only plenishing, but she knew better than to ask why her friend did not have a fire. A world of unspoken sympathy was perceptible in her kind troubled eyes.

"Every one has their little discomforts," she said at last, with a great assumption of cheerfulness. "I, on the contrary, suffer from too much heat. My room is small, as thou knowest, and I have a fire at night—they make me such a fire, my angel, I nearly suffocate. I could very well do without half the coals that they put on."

Mademoiselle stiffened visibly.

"Indeed?" she said politely, but distantly too.

"*Ja wohl*," returned Fräulein, with an awkward laugh. "I often wish that somebody could come with a little bag just to take them away—they are mine, you know; they are certainly mine, since they are put on my fire to burn for me—if somebody were to come with a little bag just to take them away, *ach*, how pleased I should be! What a kindness it would be! I should then not have to open the window before going to bed."

"Dost thou open the window before going to bed?" inquired Mademoiselle incredulously.

"*Natürlich*," replied Fräulein promptly; adding mentally, "When the weather is warm enough".

Mademoiselle pushed aside the bottles and gazed at her friend with a certain dignified severity, and remarked in frigid tones that, as no one was in the least likely ever to come to take Fräulein's coals away, it did not seem worth while discussing the idea.

"Of course, of course," responded Fräulein hastily, "I only said *if*."

"Who would do such a thing?" inquired Mademoiselle, still bristling. "A charwoman, I suppose."

"No one, no one at all, my little love," cried Fräulein,

in deep confusion. "'Twas a mere foolish thought, prompted by my own selfishness—I am so uncomfortable, dost thou see?"

"Ah!" said Mademoiselle, leaning back in her chair and folding her arms, "it is a great pity. Thou must talk to the housemaid about it."

After that Fräulein said no more, and for a day or two Mademoiselle discarded her hot bottles and kept up a brave assumption of being quite indifferent to the cold; but on one occasion her teeth began to chatter in the midst of a most interesting discussion, and Fräulein went home that night full of doughty resolution.

The fireplace in her own narrow room was not indeed so very big, nor did it seem to be unduly filled with coals, yet no sooner had the housemaid withdrawn, after setting a light to the small black pile, than Fräulein went down on her knees on the hearthrug and carefully removed the greater part of the fuel. Such a very, very tiny fire remained that she went to bed a full hour earlier than usual and corrected some twenty-five German exercises from between the blankets. Her stiffened fingers could hardly feel the pen when, having amended the last pupil's rendering of the exhilarating phrases "Have you seen the paper-knife of the uncle? No, but I have here the pen-wiper of the aunt," she gladly laid it aside and blew out her candle.

Next day with a brown-paper parcel hidden beneath her cape and a rapidly beating heart she faced the little Frenchwoman.

Depositing her parcel and taking her friend by both hands she looked her full in the eyes.

"Thou lovest me, my dear one?" she asked tremulously.

"Dost thou ask?" replied Mademoiselle, almost with indignation.

"Wilt thou not, then, give me a proof of love? Wilt thou not do me a favour?"

"Anything, anything in the world," said Mademoiselle eagerly.

"Shut thy eyes, then, and let me have my way."

"*Eh bien!*" said Mademoiselle, smiling and shutting up her eyes.

In a few minutes a fire was crackling in the grate, and at the sound she turned round with a cry.

"Be not angry, be not angry," pleaded Fräulein, throwing her arms about her. "It has cost me nothing—not one farthing—and if thou didst know how I suffer when I think that thou art cold! Are we not as sisters, after all? Is not thy friendship for me great enough to accept as well as to give?"

And then Mademoiselle cried a little and kissed her, and finally drew her chair close to the fender, spreading out her thin hands with such undisguised enjoyment that Fräulein fairly hugged herself.

After this it became a recognised thing that Fräulein should arrive each day with a brown-paper parcel under her arm, that she and her friend should sit toasting themselves over a very small but cheerful fire, and that Fräulein should scuttle home to early bed and Ollendorf with so warm a glow of happiness in her heart that it quite atoned for frozen toes and numb fingers.

One day she burst into Mademoiselle's little room full of excitement.

"I have received a present—a present sent all the way from Germany. A sausage, my dear, which you and I will eat together for tea."

"Ah!" cried Mademoiselle delightedly; and sprang up to set her spirit-lamp going. "I have tea here," she cried, as she bustled to and fro, "and milk—yes, there is quite milk enough for two—and I will get some bread in a moment. There still remains some quite fresh butter."

"I have brought thee a roll," cried Fräulein ecstatically, "a German roll, my dear, to do honour to the German sausage. It is fresh, quite hot. *Aber*, we shall enjoy ourselves!"

Mademoiselle embraced her, set forth plates and cups, milk and sugar, made the tea, and sat down, rubbing her hands.

"Let us see this famous sausage," she cried gleefully. "Why, it is a Strasburg sausage!" she exclaimed, as Fräulein hastily undid the paper wrappers and held out the long brown roll. "I thought you said it was a German one?"

"And so, of course, it is," returned Fräulein. "It comes from Strasburg, I tell thee."

"Strasburg may have been taken from us," returned Mademoiselle, with some heat—it was a subject on which she felt strongly, for though she spoke the purest Parisian French she was an Alsatian—"Strasburg may have been taken from us, but that sausage, my dear, is French. Did I not recognise it? Did I not spend my

childhood at Strasburg? And how many of these have I not eaten! Germany may claim Strasburg, but the sausage industry is a French industry—and none the worse for that!"

"My all dear one," said Fräulein, with a complacent laugh, "thou mayst call it that, if thou wilt; but the facts remain the same. Alsace is, and by right should always have been, a province of the Fatherland. If any proof of that were wanting, it could be found in the Strasburg sausage. The French are not by nature sausage-loving; the Germans are. Consequently it is very evident that——"

"I cannot sit still and listen to such nonsense," interrupted Mademoiselle. "Thou sayest these things to me—me who am an Alsatian! Do I not know my own people? I tell thee our hearts remain French, though we have been robbed of our nationality."

"Robbed!" repeated Fräulein. "That is a curious word to use, Laure."

"I cannot help it," cried Mademoiselle. "I am frank, my dear, and I must speak the truth. All the world knows how our people hate the German tongue."

Fräulein was usually a very temperate person; but her colour rose, and her voice grew shrill as she answered.

"Excuse me, it is a stupidity that you say there."

"You are politeness itself, mein Fräulein," returned Mademoiselle.

Both had dropped the familiar *du* by mutual accord. Fräulein uttered a short laugh.

"I cannot mince my words when the Fatherland is attacked,"

"And I, of course, was foolish to expect you to sympathise with my feelings. You, with the detestable pride of the conqueror, would crush us beneath your heel," cried Mademoiselle. "Sympathy—delicacy of sentiment—I was indeed foolish to expect such things in one of your race."

Fräulein's lip quivered.

"Can you speak thus to me, Laure?" she asked, in a trembling voice. "Can you look me in the face and say you have found me wanting in sympathy?"

Mademoiselle sprang to her feet, her face blazing, her little black eyes shooting fire.

"What!" she cried, "do you dare? Oh, it is odious, odious! Oh, why did I ever degrade myself by accepting benefits from you! If I starve, if I die, I tell you I will repay you to the last farthing."

Fräulein turned quite pale and rose also.

"I do not understand you, Laure," she faltered. "I alluded to no benefits. I—I spoke merely of the friendship which——"

In her agitation she stammered and broke down.

Mademoiselle fixed her with her fiery gaze and pointed at her with a little knobby finger.

"Do not deny it," she cried; "do not. You have betrayed yourself. Yes, you were thinking of those coals, those accursed coals." She rushed to the hearth and began feverishly to rake out the little fire.

"You shall be paid, I say," she exclaimed at intervals, as she hammered on the embers, "paid to the last mite!"

"If it is possible that you speak in sincerity," said

Fräulein, in a very quavering voice, but with much dignity, "if you really believe your own words, if you can think me capable of that of which you accuse me, I have nothing to say—there is an end of everything between us."

"An end, indeed!" returned Mademoiselle, still simmering with wrath. "Would to God there had never been a beginning! I should at least have preserved my self-respect."

Fräulein put on her battered hat and her worn jacket and muffler in silence and with shaking fingers, and walked to the door with lagging steps. Mademoiselle, without looking at her, continued to scrape and hammer at the coals. The door closed, and Mademoiselle turned round with a start, glanced at the table, sprang towards it, and was out on the landing just as Fräulein began to descend the second flight.

"Take your abominable sausage," she cried; and sent the packet flying through the air.

Fräulein started as it fell with a thud at her feet, looked up with a world of reproach in eyes which had grown very pink about the lids, pushed the sausage out of her way with the patched toe of her boot, and continued to descend without a word.

Mademoiselle went back to her bare room and looked round at the blank hearth, the table where lay the un-tasted remains of the little feast which she had intended to enjoy with her friend, the chair which she had knocked over in her recent outburst—all was desolation and gloom. But wrath swallowed up regret.

"She shall be paid!" she cried, between her clenched teeth—"paid *jusqu' à la dernière obole*!"

And Heaven knows how, by what miracles of pinching and scraping, the money was got together; ten shillings—more indeed, in all probability, than the actual value of Fräulein's daily offering. The postal order was enclosed in an envelope with Mademoiselle's "Compliments and thanks," and sent by post, though the two teachers still met every day, passing each other by with a regal salute.

Mademoiselle felt better after she had discharged her obligation; but Fräulein hid the letter away with many tears. She was a foolish little woman—foolish enough, after all that had passed, to groan to herself, as she sat by her fire, at the remembrance of Mademoiselle's icy room.

But the Frenchwoman had her beer-bottles and her triumphant sense of restored self-respect; no doubt she felt quite happy.

One day Fräulein remarked, as she met Mademoiselle in the passage, that the latter's hands were covered with cracked and swollen chilblains—so much so that she evidently could not put on a glove.

Mademoiselle greeted her with a sliding curtsy and went on, but not before she had caught a look of almost piteous consternation in Fräulein's eyes.

On taking her class a few days later Mademoiselle found her pupils engaged in an eager discussion. The German lesson was just over, and Fräulein had passed her in the doorway with averted face.

"Only think," said one of the children, "poor

Fräulein has been telling us about a German Christmas, and how every one has a Christmas-tree, even the grown-ups. They make each other presents, and are all so jolly and happy. Do you know, Mademoiselle, when Fräulein was in the middle of telling us about it, she suddenly began to cry!"

"Of course she has no one—no one at all—to keep Christmas with," said an older girl.

"*Dictée* number one hundred and seventeen," said Mademoiselle, in an odd harsh tone.

But though she assumed a very business-like air, and often reproved her pupils for inattention, her own thoughts wandered frequently from *dictée* number one hundred and seventeen. Do what she would, the girl's words kept coming back to her. "Of course she has no one—no one at all—to keep Christmas with." And Germans thought so much of Christmas; it was a pity that she could not even have her little tree. If they had remained friends, they might have had a little tree between them, with a few oranges and crackers, and five or six tiny tapers; and Mademoiselle might have given Fräulein that pretty blue necktie, which she had never worn. Fräulein adored blue; she would have been enchanted. And what a surprise it would have been! She saw it all. The little feast would, of course, be kept in her room; Fräulein would utter shrieks of joy, and would come round the table to embrace her. But what use to think of such things? All that was impossible now; they could never, never be friends again.

The very next morning a small parcel came by post

to Mademoiselle directed in printed characters. Inside was a pair of mittens, beautifully knitted in a fancy stitch, and with cuffs extending a long way down the wrists. Mademoiselle looked at them with an odd expression, and turned them over and over; finally she put them on. They were very soft and warm, and fitted to a nicety. She sat staring at them with a curious medley of emotions. The sense of injury was still there, lingering resentment, wounded pride. Nevertheless, she could not but remember the dismay with which Fräulein had gazed at her poor swollen hands.

"She loves me still," said Mademoiselle aloud, with a distinct note of exultation in her voice.

Poor Amalia! After all, she had sent her back the postal order, and could, in consequence, afford to be generous; she would wear the mittens. And so, instead of passing Fräulein with her usual stately air, she stopped short when next they met and held out her hands in their new coverings.

"Have I not to thank you for these?" she said. "Have I not to thank thee?" she added, as Fräulein gazed back at her, reddening, uncertain what to say.

"*Ach, meine Liebe!*" ejaculated Fräulein, and fell into her arms; and the last remnant of ill-feeling melted away from Mademoiselle's heart as she returned the embrace.

"*Ach, how good—how good it is to think that Christmas will not be so desolate, after all,*" said Fräulein. "*Ach, mein Herschen, if thou didst but know how I dreaded it! At least we shall be together.*"

"But certainly, my dear," replied Mademoiselle, with
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an air of importance. "I have planned it all. Thou must come to me, and I will make thee a little *fête*."

"*Aber!* thou above all most amiable," cried Fräulein delightedly; "thou didst plan it all when we were not even friends."

"*Si, si, ma chérie!*" responded Mademoiselle magnanimously, "we were always friends. A little quarrel no more puts an end to true friendship than a cloud could extinguish the sun. So, then, it is understood we keep Christmas together."

It was even more difficult to be absorbed in *dictée* number one hundred and eighteen than in its predecessor. Between the sentences which she enunciated with such laborious distinctness Mademoiselle was planning, contriving, calculating her resources. The *fête* must be a real *fête*; she would astonish Amalia.

"What do you ask, my child? Certainly *rivière* is feminine. What else would you expect it to be? *Point et virgule.*" There should be no sausages—certainly no sausages. Perhaps a little pie. Oh! it would be difficult to find money for it all. And so absorbed in prospective managing was Mademoiselle that it was not until several pairs of large round eyes were fixed upon her that she realised that it was some time since the class had written the last word.

Who shall say how Mademoiselle did manage to procure funds for her Christmas party? She looked very thin and cold and yellow during the preceding days, and a certain brooch which she usually wore unaccountably disappeared. Nevertheless, she made herself look quite smart on Christmas Day, and her little

room had such a gay and festive appearance that Fräulein fairly gasped when her friend threw open the door. There was a blazing fire, to begin with; the chimney-piece was garnished with a wreath of paper flowers and lit up with a pair of coloured candles. The table was covered with a spotless cloth and adorned in similar fashion—as much of it, at least, as Fräulein could see, for the greater part of it was hidden from her view by a large open umbrella.

“One moment!” cried Mademoiselle excitedly, as her friend hurried forward. “Just one moment, my beloved Amalia. I prepare a surprise. Shut thy eyes for a moment.”

Fräulein, with a cackle of delighted anticipation, screwed up her eyes and turned away her head. The scraping of a match was heard, and a moment later the furling of the umbrella.

“Now thou mayst look!” cried Mademoiselle jubilantly.

And, lo and behold! there, in the centre of the table, was a tiny tree, all covered with little candles, with oranges and apples fastened to the branches, and at the very top a paper *Christ-kindchen* cut out and coloured by Mademoiselle’s own hands. And at the foot there was a small parcel with the words “To my dearest Amalia” most legibly written, and there was Mademoiselle herself positively glowing with happiness as she stood by laughing and rubbing her hands. Never, perhaps, had an innocent dream been so completely realised.

Fräulein’s shrieks of joy were, however, lacking at first, for the simple reason that the little creature could

not utter a sound of any kind. She could only rush at her friend and fold her in her arms, and kiss her on both cheeks. But all at once she found her voice, and then what laughing and crying, what exclamations! And with what triumph did she in her turn produce from under her cape a little bundle carefully enveloped in tissue paper, which, on being unfolded, proved to be a very marvel of a silk blouse! It was of the brightest pink—she knew that Mademoiselle had a weakness for pink—and was tastefully adorned with brown bows. Mademoiselle ecstatically pronounced it to be of the last *chic*, and immediately held it up to her face that her friend might see how well it became her. The effect was, in truth, to make her complexion a shade more lemon-coloured than usual; but Fräulein contemplated her with entire satisfaction, and announced that it suited her to perfection. Mademoiselle declared herself, in tremulous tones, to be quite overcome at Fräulein's generosity; as a matter of fact that blouse was a very expensive affair—it had cost rather more than ten shillings. A certain postal order which had been long laid by had been recently cashed with a joyful heart.

So the pair sat down, one on each side of the tree, and Mademoiselle's good things were duly appreciated; and there was much talk and laughter, and the lop-sided candles seemed to burn more and more brightly, and the little *Christ-kindchen* looked very benign. In the whole of England was merry-making and feasting that blessed Christmas night; but perhaps no corner of it was more cheerful than the garret where the two little aliens rejoiced together.

MRS. GRADWELL'S PIANO.

MRS. GRADWELL, having returned from a shopping expedition at Little Upton, two miles away, removed her "blacks," still crinkling and glossy enough to denote that her bereavement was of recent date, donned her bedgown, and sat down in the elbow-chair by the hearth, with the long-drawn "Eh, dear," so familiar to the lips of the Lancashire housewife.

For all her seeming air of melancholy (a tribute, no doubt, to the memory of her lately departed James), Mrs. Gradwell, as she sat by her own brilliantly polished hearthstone, was at heart a happy and contented woman. She had been "well left," there could be no doubt of that ; her gaffer, moreover, had been considerate enough to manage his "deedin'" after a fashion most profitable to his relict. He had been ill just long enough to justify his membership of the local benefit club, and he had departed before the weekly stipend from that institution had diminished, as would naturally have been the case if his illness had been unduly protracted. Mrs. Gradwell had drawn his insurance money, and, though she had given him "as nice a burying as was ever seen in Thornleigh village," she still found herself with some six or seven pounds in hand. She was now about to effect the sale of a certain portion of her household gear,

preparatory to taking up her abode with her married son and his hard-working wife, a person to whom she ever distantly alluded as "the yoong woman". She intended thenceforth to rest herself, while the said submissive daughter-in-law worked a little harder than before: she could make it worth while, as she had more than once hinted to "our Tom," to keep her for nothing; nevertheless, she did intend to pay a trifle towards the expenses of her maintenance, just enough to enable her to boast that she was not "behowden" to "nob'ry," but not enough to enable her own kin to make any profit by her.

All these considerations were sufficient material for the satisfaction displayed in Mrs. Gradwell's ruddy countenance on this particular evening; she even smiled to herself as she extended first one stocking foot and then the other to the ruddy glow; but at the sound of approaching steps and a hurried tap at the door she immediately composed herself to a becoming aspect of resigned melancholy.

"Coom your ways in," she cried, half turning in her chair. "Coom in—coom reet in."

The door opened, disclosing the figure of a little squat square-faced woman, attired, like Mrs. Gradwell herself, in the striped petticoat and cotton bedgown, now only worn by the elders of the village.

"'Tis you, Mrs. Winstanley, is it?" said Mrs. Gradwell, with the curious sideways jerk of the head, which is the usual greeting among members of her class.

"It's me," said Mrs. Winstanley. "And how met ye find yo'rself to-neet, Mrs. Gradwell?"

"Ah—h—h," groaned Mrs. Gradwell, casting up her eyes, "as well as I can 'ope to be. 'Tis wonderful lonesome wi'out my gaffer; but I'm not one as was ever used to repine, loove, and so I fixes my 'opes where 'opes ought to be fixed, Mrs. Winstanley, and I'm bearin' up as well as I can."

"Ah—h," sighed her neighbour sympathetically, "you was always a feelin' woman, Mrs. Gradwell, wasn't ye? An' I'm sure yo're in the reet to tak' coomfort. You've a many consolations, Mrs. Gradwell, my dear."

"You'd ha' said so," agreed the widow, "if you could ha' see'd how quiet my poor James went off. 'Twas like a hinfant—a body 'ud scarce believe it."

"And what were the last word he said?" inquired the newcomer, still in the subdued and mournful tone proper to the occasion.

Mrs. Gradwell hesitated. "He were wanderin' a bit in's mind," she remarked, presently—"wanderin' a little bit. He took some notion about his watch—he couldn't seem to mind who he'd left it to—"

"And he'd left it to you, o' coarse," put in the visitor eagerly. There had been some discussion on the subject amid the village gossips.

"It were loomped wi' the rest," responded Mrs. Gradwell hastily. "But he got talkin'—our James did—and so, jest to quiet him, I says to him, firm-like, but gentle, ye know—'James,' I says, 'howd thy toongue, James,' I says, 'and get for'ard wi' thy deein', an' he never spoke another word arter that."

A pause ensued, during which the widow, affected

by these touching reminiscences, wiped away a tear, and Mrs. Winstanley cast a furtive glance round the room.

"Ye've fixed the sale for next week, haven't ye?" she inquired, leaning forward after a moment, a hand on either knee, her eyes unusually eager.

Mrs. Gradwell cast a sharp glance at her as she restored her handkerchief to her capacious pocket, and nodded.

"Next week?" repeated Mrs. Winstanley. "I hear yo're goin' to part wi' the pianney?"

"Ah—h, it'll 'ave to go," conceded her friend. "They big things is so awkward to shift, ye see. The pianney'll have to go, and I'm sorry for't, for it have been in our family nigh upon thirty year, Mrs. Winstanley."

"Well," said Mrs. Winstanley, pursing up her lips, "our Lena—I'm on the look-out for a pianney for her. Hoo'll never do no good at the music, they tellen her up at the school, wi'out hoo practises reg'lar, an' it's unpossible for her to do that wi'out we has a pianney i' the 'ouse."

"That's true," agreed Mrs. Gradwell dispassionately.

"An' so, I wur thinkin'," pursued her friend tentatively, "as I met jest have a look at yo'rn, Mrs. Gradwell, my dear."

"So ye can," responded Mrs. Gradwell, still without any appearance of eagerness.

"Could I see it now, think you?" inquired her friend.

Mrs. Gradwell rose without speaking, and preceded her visitor into the parlour, a musty-smelling but very elegantly furnished room, with knitted antimacassars on every chair and a wealth of such ornaments as are dear to the village soul—spotted china dogs, Berlin wool mats, a stuffed drake with an excrescence on its head, and a fearful presentment of Mrs. Gradwell herself in a highly gilt frame over the mantel-piece. In one corner of this apartment stood a little spindle-legged cottage piano, draped like the chairs in a variety of antimacassars, and supporting a vase of wax flowers under a glass case. Its proprietor opened it with an air of chastened pride, and stepped back while the would-be purchaser dubiously surveyed the yellow case.

"There don't seem to be so many notes as the one up in the school has got," she remarked.

"I dare say," agreed Mrs. Gradwell; "there's a many childer to play on the one up i' the school; they'd need a good few notes."

"That's true," conceded Mrs. Winstanley.

After a pause she tentatively stretched out her hand and struck the keys with one finger. The sound of each was accompanied by a curious jangling within the body of the instrument; but Mrs. Winstanley took no notice of this, and continued her painstaking investigations from bass to treble, pausing only when repeated efforts failed to produce a response of any kind from the three topmost notes.

"They don't seem to make no sound at all," she said, turning round with a dismayed face.

But Mrs. Gradwell gazed back at her stolidly.

"I wonder how 'tis they don't make no sound," persisted her neighbour.

"I mind," remarked Mrs. Gradwell pleasantly, "our gaffer set down a moog of ale on the wood here a good few year ago and jogged it wi' his elbow. He jest saved it from upsettin', but soom o' the beer splashed over. I shouldn't wonder if it wur that, Mrs. Winstanley."

"I shouldn't wonder," echoed her neighbour, gazing hard at her the while. "I doubt there ought to be a re-daction for that."

Mrs. Gradwell laughed, as though much amused, but presently composed herself. "I don't interfere noways wi' the auctioneer, Mrs. Winstanley. I agreed wi' him for that. Says I, 'I'll not interfere wi' you, Mr. Johnson. I'll leave the whole business i' yo'r 'ands,' I says. 'Mak' yo'r own terms,' says I, 'I'll not interfere.' So, Mrs. Winstanley, you must say whatever you 'as to say to Mr. Johnson. The pianney's a good pianney—you'll 'ave no need to be afeard o' bein' took in, same as you met do if you was to go and buy one off a stranger. Theer 'tis, wheer it's allus stood for thirty year. If you fancy it you can bid for it, same as another—if you don't you can leave it alone; but don't ax me for to interfere wi' Mr. Johnson."

With that Mrs. Gradwell returned to the kitchen, Mrs. Winstanley following in her wake with a somewhat abashed air, as though she had been guilty of a solecism.

"Theer's Mrs. Newton," resumed her hostess as she dropped into her chair again; "hoo was very anxious to buy in that theer pianney."

"Mrs. Newton!" exclaimed the other, indignant. "Eh, dear, I never did know a body so havin' an' so covetous as Mrs. Newton. Hoo's allus on the look-out for whatever hoo can grab—hoo's that—but I reckon Mr. Johnson'll not get mich brass out o' Mrs. Newton."

"Hoo'll tak' her chance like onyb'ry else. Hoo'll bid, and ye can bid agin her, as long as ye like."

Mrs. Winstanley rose. "I'll see," she remarked; "happen I met jest as well as not buy one in a shop."

"I wouldn't advise ye to," returned Mrs. Gradwell, with a detached air; "theer's no knowin' 'ow much expense they'd go for to run ye into, what wi' the carriage, and the toonin' an' that—why, they 'as to toon the school pianney reg'lar once i' two months. Now my pianney 'aven't never been tooned since our Tom's weddin', an' that's fifteen year ago, mind ye. It don't need it. An', what's more," she continued, working up with her theme, "if ye go for to buy a second-and pianney out o' one o' them theer shops, 'ow are ye to know 'ow many folks has been playin' on it, and weerin' on it out? Now my pianney, I can say wi' truth as nobody's touched it more nor two or three times in twenty year. So it's got all the goodness in it, Mrs. Winstanley."

Mrs. Winstanley turned her head on one side and reflected, but she was not going to commit herself; she brushed an imaginary crumb from the side folds of her petticoat, and remarked that she'd think about it, and

that as like as not she would step in on the sale day, but she couldn't be sure. Mrs. Gradwell also feigned indifference, but watched her with a curious sidelong look as she made her way to the door, and fell into deep thought as it closed behind her.

As a result of her meditations she decided to set forth on the following morning to call on Mrs. Newton. She found that lady heated in countenance and agitated in mind as she endeavoured at one and the same time to prepare the family dinner, to accomplish the ironing of a variety of small garments, which lay, in the crumpled condition peculiar to rough-dried articles, in a large basket beside her, and to quiet a pair of uproarious twin babies which were lying feet to feet in a wooden cradle.

"Always busy," remarked the visitor, as she stepped indoors.

"Eh, dear," responded Mrs. Newton.

"The twins, they cooms on wonderful," pursued Mrs. Gradwell, whose countenance was wreathed in smiles.

"An' so they do, bless their little 'earts," replied the mother, glancing fondly down at them. "Theer's a leg, Mrs. Gradwell, as mottled and as firm—feel it."

As, hastily, and with a damp finger, she twitched back the blanket to display the limb in question, the twin to whom it did not belong, and who had been hitherto cooing and ogling her in a tentative manner, burst into an indignant wail, and had immediately to be abstracted from its tumbled couch.

"I'm fair moidered wi' the lot o' them though," said Mrs. Newton, with a change of tone.

"Ah, but yo're such a model mother," returned her neighbour, shaking her head with an admiring air. "Theer, I shouldn't think there ever was such a mother as you are, Mrs. Newton. All as you do for they childer o' yourn—the edication as you give 'em!"

"Well, I do my best," returned the mother, with a bewildered air.

"Dear, yes," resumed Mrs. Gradwell. "When I hear 'em i' church now, singin' so nice; eh, dear, it seems to me by times as if they 'ad the v'ices o' little hangels. Your Agnes Etta, yo' know, an' little Florency—ow sweet they sing, don't they?"

"They do that," agreed the mother, straightening herself and gazing hard at the newcomer.

"They practise their hymns a lot at home, I s'pose, as well as what they learn i' the school?"

"Nay, I can't say as they do. Theer's allus such a deal o' noise here, an' wi' all they little uns tumblin' about, I can't say as there's much time for singin'."

"Tisn't as if ye had a pianney," remarked Mrs. Gradwell, with her eyes roaming thoughtfully round the room.

Mrs. Newton, dandling the baby and swaying from side to side, gazed earnestly at her visitor.

"I've often longed for a pianney," she remarked. "Ye mightn't think it, Mrs. Gradwell, but I used to play the pianney mysel' once. I had a wonderful good ear, and I used to pick out a' many toones wi' jest hearin' of 'em once or twice."

"I've had a pianney for thirty year," remarked Mrs. Gradwell, suddenly bringing down her gaze from the top

of the dresser to Mrs. Newton's face, on which the interest was growing.

"It's to be sold, isn't it?" cried the latter eagerly.

"Next week," replied Mrs. Gradwell, "at the auction."

Mrs. Newton continued to dandle the baby, and gazed harder than ever at the portly form before her. "I reckon things 'ull go dear," she observed, after a pause.

"I've left everything to Mr. Johnson," said Mrs. Gradwell, with an innocent air, "everything. Says I to him, 'Mr. Johnson,' I says, 'manage everything your own way—I'll not interfere,' I says. And I won't. But I tell you what I'd do if I was you—I'd coom and 'ave a look at it. It'll cost you nothing to 'ave a look at the pianney, Mrs. Newton, an' if ye like to bid, why, ye can, ye know. Theer's nought to prevent ye biddin' for't, and as soon as the price gets above what you're meaning to give, why, ye can stop, ye know."

"So I can," said poor Mrs. Newton, still gazing at her wistfully. Golden dreams of an occasional half-hour snatched from her busy day which might be employed in picking out the once familiar tunes, of hearing Agnes Etta and Florency raise their childish pipes as they stood one on each side of her of an evening—why, even the twins would surely be soothed and cheered by such music! Perhaps the little lasses might learn to play—visions of chubby fingers wandering over the keys, of the neighbours' rapture, of the teacher's applause, came to dazzle the poor hard-working mother as she stood irresolute.

"Well, theer'd be no harm in coomin'," she remarked presently. "I'll think about it, Mrs. Gradwell."

Thereupon that thrifty body took her departure, feeling that she had done a good morning's work.

The day of the sale came, and Mrs. Gradwell, very fine in her "blacks," and with a yard more crape in her "fall" than had ever yet been worn by any Thornleigh widow, was in her glory. The pig fetched more than she had dared to hope for in her wildest dreams. The gaffer's old arm-chair was knocked down to Farmer Leatherbarrow, who never discovered that the spring was broken; the lustre china was bought in by a Liverpool dealer at a price which astonished even Mrs. Gradwell herself; while as for the piano—the bidding for it was so brisk between Mrs. Newton and Mrs. Winstanley, that there was no knowing for how much it would ultimately be knocked down. Poor Mrs. Newton, clutching a baby, while Agnes Etta staggered beneath the weight of the other, and Florence and one or two of the lads clung to her skirt, held her ground in spite of the pertinacity of Mrs. Winstanley.

Shilling by shilling the price mounted, and still neither would give way. Mr. Johnson positively laughed as he turned from one to the other of the excited rivals. The younger onlookers cheered and backed, now this one, and now that.

When the sum of ten pounds was reached, Mrs. Newton began to look anxious, and her voice had a somewhat piteous intonation as she called out "Ten pounds one!" But Mrs. Winstanley was not to be outdone, and in shrill key topped her by half a crown. Mrs. Newton desperately increased her bid

by another shilling, but Mrs. Winstanley added five shillings to hers. Thus it went on, until at last a total of fifteen pounds was reached; and then Mrs. Newton, bursting into tears, declared herself "fair beat".

"Coom, childer," she cried brokenly; "coom, Agnes Etta, coom, Florency—we's be goin'. Theer'll not be no pianney for us this time. Eh, I dunno how hoo could ha' had the 'eart—hoo as 'as but the one lass, an' me wi' all that rook o' little childer! How could I stan' up to her?"

Weeping, she made her way out of the place, and weeping the children followed her. So dim, indeed, were Mrs. Newton's eyes, that she scarcely recognised the familiar form of the Canon as he suddenly barred her progress, and it was not until he had laid his hand upon her arm that she came to herself.

"What are all these tears about?" he inquired kindly; for he took a special interest in the usually cheery little woman. "Couldn't you get the piano after all?" He had heard about the rivalry between his two parishioners.

"It went for fifteen pound," sobbed the poor woman. "I couldn't rise so high, I couldn't."

The Canon burst out laughing. "Fifteen pounds!" he cried. "My dear woman, you should thank your stars for your escape. The thing wasn't worth five—I know it of old. It was poor James Gradwell's boast that he bought it at a sale at Upton for three pounds ten, and that was thirty years ago."

But Mrs. Winstanley was very proud of her bargain, and was never tired of bragging of her victory.



MRS. GRADWELL'S PIANO

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The sale of Mrs. Gradwell's piano was, in fact, a source of general satisfaction, for Mrs. Newton, who was a biddable little body, obeyed her pastor in rejoicing at her escape, and Mrs. Gradwell herself felt the transfer to be an additional item in the sum of mercies for which she daily made thanksgiving to a discriminating Providence.

THE TRANSPLANTING OF A DAISY.

MRS. MONSON was busy in her garden when Izzy Knott came up the path. It was a very tiny garden, but Mrs. Monson tended it with as much love and assiduity as she had lavished on the Rectory garden, which for so many years had been her chief delight. Two incumbents had been successively in possession of the living since those days, and a third was now reigning ; but little Mrs. Monson remained apparently the same, tending her minute patch of garden, teaching her class every Sunday, transforming one village girl after another into very efficient little maids.

Efficient at least they were in her eyes ; they all wore their hair very smooth, and polished their faces very clean, and bobbed little curtsies whenever any one spoke to them, and knocked at every door before venturing to enter. Mrs. Monson would no more have tolerated a speck of dust on her threadbare carpet than she would have endured a dead leaf on the few square yards of turf which she dignified with the title of lawn ; her pupils were, moreover, instructed to take plenty of time in washing up tea-things and polishing knives, to investigate every corner of passage and stair-way every single day, and to perform, in fact, a variety of duties with as much thoroughness as decorum.



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Izzy was the best girl of them all, Mrs. Monson frequently averred, and having arrived at the mature age of seventeen, and being anxious—to quote from Mrs. Monson's phraseology—"to improve herself," she had sought that kind old lady's help in obtaining a situation. Mrs. Monson had determined to look further afield on behalf of this particular *protégée* than she had done on similar occasions.

"Izzy is too good to be thrown away on village people," she remarked, and therefore, following the advice of the doctor's wife who was a friend of hers, she had inserted an advertisement in the *Morning Post*.

And Izzy had obtained a very grand situation indeed; she was going all the way to Windsor, to be under-housemaid to a certain Lady Catherine Langley, whose husband was an officer in the Guards; and on this particular day, being about to take her departure in the carrier's cart which was to convey her to the five-miles-distant railway-station, she had come to say farewell to her patroness.

Mrs. Monson dropped her garden scissors into her flat basket, and trotted down the path to meet her, pausing on the way to press back into place a small pebble which had detached itself from its gravelled surface.

Izzy bobbed her curtsy, but the old lady, leaning forward, took possession of the broad hand in its cotton glove.

"God bless you, my dear child," she said, with a little quaver in her voice.

"Thank you, m'm," said Izzy, curtsying again, while the corners of her mouth went first up and then down, and her round eyes blinked for a moment.

Izzy's eyes were very round and of an indeterminate bluish-grey; her cheeks were round too, and red; her dark hair was only just long enough to form a very small, very compact little knob low down on her neck. She was not tall, but she was broad, and looked strong; her customary gait was a kind of trot, designed, no doubt, to serve as counterpoise to the protracted time which she devoted to the accomplishment of her household tasks.

"You are a very lucky girl, you know," said Mrs. Monson, releasing her hand.

"'E-es'm," returned Izzy, and the corners of her mouth went up again; indeed that honest good-humoured face of hers was seldom without a smile.

"You'll remember all I told you," said Mrs. Monson, proceeding to recapitulate certain pieces of advice relating to matters spiritual and temporal; to all of which Izzy duly responded "'E-es'm," with an air of profound attention.

"You mustn't say 'E-es' any more, you know," said the old lady, holding up an admonitory finger; "and when you are speaking to Lady Catherine Langley you must say 'My Lady,' or 'Your Ladyship'."

"'E-es'm," responded Izzy, and then, correcting herself quickly, "Yes, my Lady".

Mrs. Monson laughed softly and rubbed her hands. "I think you will do very well," she said; "I shall



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be much disappointed if you do not get on very well. Now good-bye, my child, and God bless you. I think I see the carrier's cart coming now. Your mother will want a few words with you before you go."

"Mother be a-goin' with I so far as the station, please'm," said Izzy. "But I must just run home-along an' say good-bye to Granny—there's a lot o' folks do want to see I off. Maggie Frisby, she do say she'd like a place in Windsor too. I told her I'd look out for one for her."

"Maggie is too young to think of leaving home yet," answered Mrs. Monson rather stiffly, "and I'm not quite sure that in her case— You must leave older and wiser heads to settle things like that, Izzy. Now trot away, child, for I don't fancy you have much time."

"No'm, thank ye'm," said Izzy, with a farewell dip.

Then she did trot away, closing the gate very carefully after her; and Mrs. Monson watched the retreating figure until it disappeared down the lane which led to the village.

"She was the best of them all," she said to herself with a little sigh, as she drew her scissors from the basket.

The carrier's cart had already paused before the gate of Izzy's home. Granny herself had hobbled as far as the threshold and was on the look-out for her. Mother was fastening her cape; Jim and Jack were conveying the well-corded tin box and the green carpet-bag, containing her worldly goods, to the cart, the occupants of which were craning their heads with

good-humoured curiosity from beneath the antiquated green hood. Maggie Frisby, Chrissie Meatyard, and several more of Izzy's friends had gathered round the vehicle; as its driver remarked with a grin: "The maid was havin' a proper good send-off!"

Izzy's face was all smiles now; she hugged her granny, who clapped her on the back, and told her facetiously she'd be that grand an' that set-up she wouldn't speak to them most likely when next she came that way again.

She kissed her brothers and little sisters and her friends, half climbed into the cart where her mother was already installed, jumped down again, ran back into the house to fetch the big posy, which she had forgotten, from the kitchen table, and finally clambered into her place, breathless and scarlet.

"Well, now," said the carrier, "be that all? Be ye quite sure? Bain't there nothin' else ye've left behind—not your heart for instance? I didn't see no young chap come to say good-bye wi' the others!"

"Sh-sh-sh!" said Mrs. Knott reprovingly, "my maid don't care for sich talk, Mr. Inkpen. She bain't one o' that kind. There, Mrs. Monson she've a-brought her up strict and she did always tell her never to ha' nothin' at all to do wi' menfolk."

"O-ooh," said the carrier, gathering up the reins and glancing quizzically at Izzy. "Well, the maid herself 'ull ha' summat to say to that in a year or two, I d' low, but she be young enough to wait!"

"And that's true," agreed the other matrons in the cart, and they glanced smilingly at Izzy, who smiled



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back again, and sniffed at her nosegay, and looked complacently from time to time at those squeaky shiny boots which were the joy of her soul.

"The very minute I did set eyes on that maid," said a fat old lady with a market-basket precariously poised on her knees, "I says to myself, 'There goes one o' the good old-fayshioned sort. Anybody can see as she've a-been brought up well and respectable. No fallals and fringes and new-fangled fayshions about her.'"

"She've a-been trained so, d'ye see," responded Mrs. Knott. "Mrs. Monson, that's her mistress, she did always p'int out as 'twas best to be simple. She wouldn't never allow no flowers nor ribbons what was too bright, nor so much as a frill o' lace. Izzy, there, she've a-got so many good things as a maid mid wish to have, but they be all plain."

Indeed poor Izzy's attire was of simplicity itself. A brown dress reaching just below the ankles, a black jacket, unenlivened even by braid, a brown mushroom hat trimmed with ribbon to match, a linen collar and the cotton gloves aforementioned; nevertheless, with her bright face, and her big posy, she presented a picture of a country maid that was far from unpleasing.

During the five miles' drive conversation was kept up with unimpaired vigour; those of the occupants of the cart who knew each other discoursed of intimate matters concerning their neighbours; those who were strangers listened with deep interest, and presently discoursed of matters, more or less intimate, concerning themselves. Izzy smiled in her corner, and thought of

Windsor, and the King and Queen, and the Castle, and the Park, and the Forest, and of all the other wonderful things Mrs. Monson had told her she might expect to see.

Arrived at the station, her ticket was duly taken and handed over to her with many injunctions by Mrs. Knott, who further presented her with a small purse containing a few shillings ; then her box was put into the van, and her carpet-bag put under the seat of the compartment selected for her, and finally it was time to part.

"Then good-bye, my dear, and God bless 'ee. Take care o' theeself—but I know thee'll do that!" said Mrs. Knott, as the train began to move off.

Izzy drew in her head and waved her handkerchief ; her eyes were once more a little dim and her mouth disposed to droop, but after a moment she sat down in her corner with as bright a face as ever, and having counted her money, stowed away her purse in her pocket, and tucked her ticket into her glove, she smiled broadly at her opposite neighbour.

"'Tis best to have your ticket handy, they do ax for it so often, mother said," she remarked.

"So long as it don't get lost," responded the other.

"Oh, I shan't lost it," said Izzy confidently.

Then every one else in the carriage laughed a little, and Izzy got rosier than ever and buried her face in her posy.

Grove House, Windsor, was situated conveniently near the Barracks, and on a certain mellow June after-

noon Sergeant Bunce chanced to pass that way. He smiled sardonically to himself as he observed a little knot of people talking together near the gate which led to the stable-entrance; it was a sight to which he was well accustomed, and which never failed to cause him a kind of contemptuous amusement. Red coats and white caps were frequently seen in conjunction in various purlieus of the royal borough; on this occasion the maidens wore no white caps, but rather hats, much befeathered and beflowered, and, as the sergeant strolled by, the group broke up into couples, each pair walking arm-in-arm.

"The cat's away as usual," said the sergeant, turning to look after them. "The mice are out for a scamper. A lot o' bloomin' fools!"

He was about to saunter on again when, from behind the gate which still stood ajar, there stepped a little figure—a little countrified figure such as Sergeant Bunce remembered to have seen often enough at home in the old county. It wore a brown hat and a brown dress, and its face was very rosy, and one hand clutched a bunch of pink horse-chestnut blossoms. The girl came forward a pace or two, and heaved a deep sigh as she, too, looked after the retreating figures; then, turning slowly, she caught sight of the sergeant.

"Oh!" cried Izzy. Her round eyes opened more widely than ever, she grinned broadly and bashfully, and, extending her hand, slowly opened her fingers; in the middle of the palm lay a particularly bright half-crown.

"Well?" said Sergeant Bunce.

"You see what I've a-got here," remarked Izzy, still bashfully, but with a certain growing confidence.

"I see," said Sergeant Bunce gruffly. "What's it for?"

"For you if ye like," said Izzy. "They did tell I up to the House as I'd never get no soldier to walk wi' me wi'out I offered him half a crown."

"Oh, they told you that, did they?" said Sergeant Bunce, flicking at his boot with his jaunty little cane. "They're a nice lot up at the House. How long have ye been there?"

"Three-week come Monday," said Izzy.

"Ah," returned the sergeant, "it's the sort of place I fancy you'd be the better away from, my girl."

"They be all kind enough," resumed Izzy confidentially, "but it's a queer place—the queerest place I was ever in."

Sergeant Bunce smiled grimly as he inquired if she'd been in many places before. "You don't look as if ye had," he added.

"'Tis what they all do say," admitted Izzy, drawing back her hand a little way, and turning over the half-crown with her thumb. "They do say I'm terr'ble simple. They do laugh at I from mornin' till night. Nay, I've been but in the one place before, and that was down to our own village in Dorset. Mrs. Monson was the lady's name, and she was a very nice lady—whatever they mid say"—this rather defiantly.

"So ye be a Dorset maid, be ye," said the sergeant, with a laugh and a sudden lapse into the familiar dialect. "Well, I'm a Dorset man myself. Shake hands on't!"

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Izzy hastily transferred her half-crown to the other hand, and complied; then, again diffidently holding out the coin, she said coaxingly: "Won't ye take it then, sir?"

The sergeant smiled as he motioned the girl's hand away from him.

"That's not in my line," he said. Then, seeing her face fall, he added: "Are ye so anxious as all that to walk out with one of us that you'll offer your money to the first man ye meet, on the chance of it?"

"Only if he looked—agree'ble," said Izzy, with something like a sob. "There, they do all tease I so, they do say no one 'ull ever look at I because my face be so ordin'ry and I be dressed so queer, that's what they do say—I'd jist like to show 'em—"

"Well, come along then," said the sergeant with sudden resolution. "Since you be a Darset maid and I be a Darset man I'll give 'ee your way for once. I rather fancy talkin' a bit o' the queer old talk. But ye mustn't look for it again," he added more severely. "It bain't in my line, I say. Put your money in your pocket and hang on."

Izzy blissfully obeyed, and the two marched away together, the girl's customary trot keeping pace with the sergeant's stride. "If Mother could only see me now," she proudly thought. Well might granny say she'd be too grand for anything when she came back.

"What's your name to begin with?" inquired the man abruptly. "Mine's Bunce—Harry Bunce. I'm a sergeant, as you can see for yourself."

Izzy's ignorant eyes had not detected the fact, but

she was much impressed nevertheless, and wondered within herself what the other folks up to the House would say when she told them.

Bunce appeared to divine her thought. "That's my name, but you've no need to mention it," he said sharply. "There's no need to talk o' this at all. If I'm lettin' ye have your fancy 'tis along o' my wishin' to speak a bit plain to ye. Now then, what be your name?"

"Izzy," returned she blushingly. "I mean Izzy-bella—Izzy-bella Knott."

"Oh, that's it?" remarked the sergeant. "Well, I'll talk to ye a bit presently, when we do come to a more private place."

Izzy looked up at him half fearfully; his face was very grave and stern. After a moment, however, he began to converse on indifferent topics—the weather, the Park, the household of the Grove, the manner of his speech varying from the broad Dorset so familiar to Izzy's ears, to the idiomatic English common in the barrack-room, and being occasionally adorned with certain figures and expressions which she did not understand.

When they had proceeded a little way they turned up a by-lane, and then silence fell between them.

"Did nobody ever tell you," inquired Bunce, after a long pause, "that 'tisn't a very safe thing for a maid to get talkin' wi' any stray chap she comes across?"

"Oh, I wouldn't do such a thing," responded Izzy indignantly. "I'd never ha' nothin' to do wi' stray chaps. 'Tis different wi' a soldier."

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"Now look 'ee here, my maid," resumed the sergeant, still in an autocratic tone, "I don't know about lines-men—they be a rotten lot, but us men in the Guards bain't a bit better nor other folks—we're mostly worse in fact—at least we're worse where a woman is concerned. And why? Because only a few of us is such fools as to get married!"

Izzy paused, much astonished, and a good deal alarmed.

"But nearly all the maids I've met wi' since I come here be a-walkin' out wi' soldiers," she remarked. "And Jane—that's the kitchen-maid—she do say her and her sweetheart be a-goin' to make a match on't very soon."

"Oh, be they?" responded the sergeant sardonically. "We'll see that! Jackson's her fellow—I've seen 'em walkin' together."

"'E-es, Corporal Jackson," interrupted Izzy.

"Well, do ye know what'll happen?" resumed Bunce. "Maybe Jackson isn't such a fool as he looks, or maybe he is. What'll happen 'ull be this anyhow: He'll up an' ax the colonel's leave to marry, an' the colonel 'ull send for me—same as he always does. An' he'll say: 'Sergeant, take Corporal Jackson round the married quarters'—"

Here the sergeant broke off to laugh derisively. "So I'll take him round, and show him the kiddies tumblin' over each other, and the women wi' their hair tumblin' into their eyes, an' the washtubs an' everything. An' he'll smell the steam, and hear the scoldin' an' the squallin', and see a family o' six, maybe, crowded into two rooms what the poor devils have to pay six-shillin'

a week for ; an' then I'll trot him back and as like as not he'll tell the colonel he've a-changed his mind— they mostly do."

Izzy suddenly jerked away her hand from his arm. The sergeant looked down at her in some surprise. "They mostly do," he repeated triumphantly. "I've took dozens of 'em round, and they mostly changes their minds. What d'ye think o' that?"

"I think," said Izzy vehemently, "I think you be a crool man ! Poor Jane, it 'ull jist about break her heart if Mr. Jackson doesn't keep his word to her. You did ought to think o' the maids so much as the men, sir."

"The maids shouldn't run arter the men, then," said the sergeant grimly. "What's a man to think when even a little daisy of a girl same as you 'ull come runnin' out wi' her half-crown, ready to take up wi' the first blackguard what wears a red coat—I might have been the greatest rascal out for anything you knew."

Izzy turned without a word and began to walk slowly away ; her head was bent, and, as she walked, she rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes. Sergeant Bunce strode after her, and soon caught her up.

"Now look here, my girl," he said, more kindly than he had yet spoken. "A soldier may be a blackguard as I say, or he may be a true man, but whichever way it be 'tis safer to let 'em alone. Take my advice and go home-along to Dorset. The country's the place for you. I know the way they carry on at Grove House, upstairs and downstairs, and the sooner you're out of it the better."



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Izzy continued to trot on without speaking ; her face was averted. After a pause she burst out :—

“ I don’t want to walk wi’ you no more. I’d be sorry to think there was more like ye in the King’s army. I don’t want ye to come arter me no more.”

“ That’s a good un,” said the sergeant, bursting into a roar of laughter.

He stood still, however, and watched the odd-looking little figure till it disappeared from view.

As may have been surmised from the foregoing incident, Izzy’s surroundings at Grove House were hardly those which Mrs. Monson would have chosen for her. Her master and mistress had not long been married, and were both very young, very gay, and very busy. They were seldom at home, and Lady Catherine had far too many engagements even when there to have much time to spare for household concerns. She had been amused at Izzy’s manners and appearance, and had directed the head housemaid to look after her and get her into shape if she could. So Izzy’s education was immediately taken in hand, and she found to her surprise that she had to begin by *unlearning* much that Mrs. Monson had taught her. There must be no curtsies, no unnecessary knocks at doors, no waste of time in investigating corners, no voluntary confessions if crockery got broken. She learnt a great many things too—more things than either she or Mrs. Monson had ever dreamed of in their simple philosophy, things which made her open her eyes very wide, and caused her habitual smile to be frequently replaced by a puzzled expression.

About six weeks after her encounter with Sergeant

Bunce she came upon that gentleman again ; she was indeed flying out of the back gate when she caught sight of him, and would have darted past him had he not barred her progress.

"So it's you, be it ?" inquired he, smiling down at her. "Come, shall us go for a walk and talk a bit o' Darset talk ?"

"No, thank you," said Izzy stiffly, "I'm—I'm busy just now."

Sergeant Bunce eyed her attentively. The short brown skirt was supplemented by a crimson frill ; its bodice was adorned with trimmings of the same hue, a boat-shaped hat with an emaciated and not over-clean white feather was set sideways on her head over a carefully curled fringe.

"What ha' you been doin' to yourself?" inquired Sergeant Bunce sternly.

"I've been tryin' to make myself look more like other maids—other gurls I mean," replied Izzy with dignity. "I'm gettin' on very well now, an' they've given over laughin' at me. One of 'em lent me this 'at for to-day."

Even in the midst of her dignity, Izzy could not refrain from being confidential.

"I see," said Sergeant Bunce. "Well, ye haven't improved yourself, my dear. Got a sweetheart yet?"

The corners of Izzy's mouth went up and down in the old way, and then her naturally sunny temper carried the day.

"I see'd somebody last night," she said. "Me and Jane run out after supper jist so far as the gate, and

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Jane met Corporal Jackson, and the corporal had a friend along of en."

"Ha!" said Sergeant Bunce. "Did ye offer en half a crown?"

"Nay now, I never knew anybody carry on so as you do carry on about that wold half-crown! No, but we did get a-talkin', an' he did say he mid very well take me out a-walkin' to-day. So Jane and me done up my dress a bit. Ye see 'twas pretty nigh dark when we was out last night, and Jane thought he—the corporal's friend—mid be disapp'nted like if he see'd I was so ord'ny by daylight."

"What be the chap's name?" asked the sergeant, with his inquisitorial air.

"Oh, we didn't get so far as that," replied Izzy, scandalised. "We did but have a few minutes' talk. He did call I a reg'lar cure," she announced, with a sudden burst of delighted laughter.

"H'm," grunted the sergeant; "now look here, my maid! You'll be a-gettin' into trouble so sure as anything if ye don't look out. You'd best come for a walk along of I. I d' low 'tis the best way o' keepin' ye out o' mischief."

Izzy eyed him with sudden solemnity. He looked very big, and serious, and magnificent. He was a sergeant—not one of them up at the House were on speaking terms with a sergeant—and he was certainly a very fine man.

She crossed to the other side, seized hold of his arm with her sturdy hand, and trotted away with him.

The sergeant twirled his moustache and flourished

his cane; after a moment or two Izzy stole a glance at his face, and saw to her satisfaction that he was smiling.

"Where was ye goin' to meet that fellow?" inquired he.

Izzy indicated the place.

"Then we'll jist turn about, and walk in the other direction."

The conversation was of an entirely amicable nature that day; there were no scoldings and no quarrels. When the pair parted Bunce shook Izzy by the hand, and informed her he was willing to take her out on the following Sunday, if she'd leave that fly-away hat at home and promise to have nothing to say during the intermediate time to Jackson's friend or any other fellow.

"I don't know about that," said Izzy, with a giggle.

"What!" cried he, wheeling round fiercely.

"We'll see," said Izzy, backing towards the house.

"Ye'll have to give me your promise," cried the sergeant.

"Well, then, maybe I will," returned she, much elated.

They did walk out on the following Sunday, and on many subsequent occasions. But as Izzy was sworn to secrecy by the discreet sergeant, and as they invariably chose unfrequented ways, the identity of her admirer was not discovered. At Grove House everybody was too busy with their own concerns to trouble themselves much about so insignificant a matter.

One November afternoon Sergeant Bunce so far

forgot his habitual caution as to steal a few moments' conversation with Izzy at the gate. There was no one about, the dusk moreover afforded a convenient cover, and he had a matter of importance to disclose to her.

"I took Corporal Jackson round this morning," he remarked, after a preliminary greeting of a somewhat warmer nature than Mrs. Monson would perhaps have approved.

"Oh, an' did ye!" cried Izzy breathlessly. "But ye didn't—"

"I didn't forget my promise. I took en round, but I didn't go for to put no spokes in your friend's wheel. I done the very opposite. Says I, when we come across a dirty-faced little brat, 'Nice little kid,' says I. So Jackson stops an' looks at it. 'Oh,' he says, 'I s'pose so.'"

A faint echo of the sergeant's former sardonic laugh was audible in the darkness, succeeded by a long-drawn sigh of gratitude from Izzy.

"I do take it real kind of ye! There, poor Jane she be a-countin' the days!"

"Yes," went on Bunce, "and when I did see a 'ooman elbow-deep in suds—'Fine stirrin' body that,' I'd say. 'That's Mrs. Spragg. I d' 'low Spragg's in luck.' Jackson, he'd look at me—" Here the sergeant laughed again. "'Well, if you say so, Sergeant Bunce,' he'd say, 'your views bein' so well known, I s'pose he is.' I made a right-down good job of Jackson," he summed up, "a right-down good job. What'll ye give me for that?"

While Izzy was giggling and the sergeant gallantly protesting that he'd earned summat and meant to be paid, a quick step was heard on the path behind them, and the light of a small electric torch was suddenly flashed upon them.

"Sergeant Bunce!" exclaimed Captain Langley in astonishment. "Well, if it had been any other man in the regiment!"

Izzy scuttled back to the house in great anguish and terror, but Sergeant Bunce stood his ground.

"What is the meaning of this?" inquired Captain Langley sternly. "I've known long enough that there's been a confounded deal too much philandering among the maids here, but that you should take part in it—*you!*!"

Sergeant Bunce cleared his throat and saluted.

"Me and that girl are neighbours at home, sir," he remarked. "At least we both come from the same county—both Dorset-born, sir."

"Indeed?" said Captain Langley.

"Yes, sir. She's a reg'lar country girl—altogether simple—when she first come she was ready to take up with any blackguard that come in her way."

"I see," said the other.

"Yes, sir. This bein' the case I've been tryin' to look after her a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Captain Langley. "I'm afraid that won't wash, sergeant."

Sergeant Bunce drew himself up very stiff, and went on, in precisely the same tone:—

"And there's another thing too, sir: she's my fancy".

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"Your what? Do you mean to say you have the cheek to tell me that you and one of my own servants——"

"I'm going to make her Mrs. Bunce, sir," replied the sergeant succinctly. "At least I intend to ask the colonel's leave——"

"Times are changed, sergeant. Don't you think before you make up your mind you had better take a little stroll round the married quarters?"

Captain Langley laughed as he spoke. The sergeant's previous perambulations in the locality mentioned having ever been a standing jest among his superior officers.

Sergeant Bunce saluted again: "I've been round this morning, sir, with Corporal Jackson".

"Jackson? What—another good man gone wrong?"

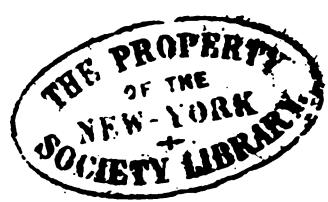
"No, sir. He's going to stick to his girl."

"Oh, is he? Times are changed indeed."

"Yes, sir, and with your leave I'll stick to mine."

Captain Langley laughed again, pocketed his torch and strolled towards the house. Sergeant Bunce closed the gate and rested his arms on the top of it, glancing towards a certain twinkling light in an upper window.

"'Tis a bit sudden," he said to himself, "a bit sudden. But there, I d' low 'twas to be. I'll tell the little maid to-morrow."





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